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ABSTRACT

This educational manual was created to fill a gap in training new volunteer and paid staff for battered women's programs, and to place the work of providing support and advocacy in a broader context. Suggestions are given for supporting battered women, including Third World women and lesbians, and for dealing with anxiety and depression. The manual also discusses child abuse and child sexual assault, and gives advice on advocacy techniques for helping women obtain social, welfare, and legal services. Issues of race, class, and sexual preference are discussed, and basic information for dealing with women in emotional crisis, and women alcoholics and drug abusers is presented. The manual gives specific examples and suggestions for handling problems staffers may encounter. An annotated bibliography and a bibliography by chapter are included. (JAC)

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FOR SHELTER AND BEYOND

An Educational Manual For Working With Women Who Are Battered

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Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups
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For Shelter And Beyond

For battered women, battered
by the fist of your keeper,
by the nailed boots of the man
drunk on the bottle or the booze of his will,
by the angry man, by the selfpitying man,
by the man kicked by those who can afford
to pass on rage.

For battered women, battered
by hunger, by poverty, by bills coming
in with the old bills unpaid and the phone
turned off and the children with no
shoes to wear to school.

For battered women, battered
by the rapist you thought your friend,
by the rapist your uncle, the rapist
in every man who uses women
like something he can wipe himself on

For battered women, battered
by birthing methods invented for doctors'
profits, with your baby
yanked out of you strapped down,
battered by social workers prying,
battered by jail, battered by divorce
court, battered by electroshock,
battered with drugs that slow your body
and snuff your mind.

For battered women, battered
by insults on the corner and on the job,
by the lack of love, by the loss of love,
by the rancid garbage abuse that come
to the aged, by the death of children,
by the death of respect for you
and who you are
battered but alive
woman ready to give birth again to hope,
ready to midwife hope
for other bleeding women.

—Marge Piercy

Dedication

We dedicate this manual
to all the women living and working
with courage and determination,
to break the silence,
stop the fear and
end the violence in our lives.

Permission to use the following is gratefully acknowledged:

"Rape Poem," which appeared in Living in the Open, *© 1976 by Marge Piercy, and "For Shelter And Beyond," published in* The Twelve-Spoked Wheel Flashing, *©1980, by Marge Piercy, both used by permission of Marge Piercy.*

"with no immediate cause," which appeared in Nappy Edges, *© by Ntozake Shange, St. Martin's Press, NY.*

Excerpts from "The Politics of Supporting Lesbianism," by Gloria Steinem which appeared in Our Right To Love, *by Virginia Vida and the National Gay Task Force, ©1978 by Virginia Vida, published by Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ.*

"Race and the Shelter Movement" by Renae Scott, "Some Thoughts on Racism" by Beverly Smith, and "Racism—A White Issue," by Ellen Pence. All three articles were originally published in Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women, *© Aegis (address and subscription information available in bibliography).*

"Mothers and Mothering," by Renae Scott, originally published (in somewhat different form) in Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women.

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Introduction To This Book

Why We Wrote This Manual

This book was created by the InService Training Committee of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups. It was done in order to fill a gap felt by many women involved in training new volunteer and paid staff of battered women's programs. Some groups had materials appropriate for some parts of their training but not for others; many groups used very few written materials, relying primarily on verbal and on-the-job training. Very little of what was being used to train new staff* was specifically focused on battered women, and almost none of it written by people who had experienced battering or worked with battered women. The reality is that women working in battered women's groups have been so overwhelmed by the amount of work to do that we have had little time to write our analysis of woman abuse and our knowledge of how to support women who've been battered. Having looked through existing training materials to see what we could compile for a manual, we found that we needed to write most of what we wanted. We've written a number of articles covering various subjects which seemed to us integral to training new staff of battered women's projects. This book is an attempt to draw on our experiences and share what we have learned with others also doing this work. It is, moreover, an attempt to put the work of providing support and advocacy to battered women and their children in the broader political context in which we exist.

We decided to write a statewide manual because it seemed unnecessary duplication to have each group develop its own orientation and training packet when much of what is covered is the same in all groups. We've therefore tried to cover topics common to all groups' training, leaving plenty of room for the differences among the various groups which make up this movement. We think that the manual can be useful to groups around the country as well, because very little of what's covered (the information on the Mass. Coalition and on the Abuse Prevention Act) is unique to Massachusetts. We hope that the existence of this book will reduce the time and energy required of trainers to find and review training materials and will improve the staff training offered by battered women's groups.

How It Was Written

In 1979 the Mass. Coalition held two statewide workshops for those involved in training new staff of battered women's programs. At these sessions we shared our experiences and ideas, learning a lot from each other, and formed the InService Training Committee to compile and write needed training materials.

The InService Training Committee collectively decided what materials we thought were necessary to write, and split the topics among us. We also asked other women from Coalition member groups to write some of the articles. Drafts were brought back to the committee for critique and then rewritten once or several times until the committee approved of each of the articles to be published. We feel that this process was important because it ensured that each article would reflect a variety of experiences rather than any one woman's. We then sent a draft of the educational manual to all member groups of the coalition for comments and suggestions, and incorporated those to our satisfaction, making the manual reflective of a still larger body of experience. The manual was then edited for cultural and racial bias with some rewriting, and edited one final time. Though this process has taken a long time—over a year—the manual reflects the thoughts and ideas of many, many women who have experienced and/or worked against woman abuse.

This manual is not the final say on working with women who've been battered; it does not cover every aspect of the work. We have written what we consider to be important materials for educating women to do this work, and know that there are more articles to be written. We encourage other women to write from their experiences, and hope that the InService Training Committee will continue to provide educational materials as well. Some of the issues we would like to see

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**When we use the term "staff" we refer both to volunteer and paid staff.*

covered which aren't include anti-semitism, ageism, staff support and burnout, housing issues (such as landlord discrimination against mothers and children), and the particular difficulties of prostitutes who are battered.

How To Use This Manual

We've prepared the chapters of this book to follow the general topics usually covered through verbal and video presentations in staff training. It needs to be used in conjunction with in-person training; staffers can read relevant chapters in preparation for each orientation session. In addition, staffers can refer back to the manual after their orientation training, as they begin to do the work.

We expect that each group using the manual will add information relevant to its work and to its community which is not covered here, such as other materials on battering and rape, house and/or support group guidelines, a description of the organization and how it functions, a description of its structure and procedures and any other materials which would assist women in participating in the work against woman abuse.

In addition, we have included two bibliographies which together provide extensive resources on the subjects covered by the manual for those who want more information. We have tried as much as possible to include only resources which we know to be useful and to be supportive of battered women.

Who Has Done The Work

The members of the committee who worked on this manual are Claudia Askew (Lawrence Women's Resource Center), Chris Butler (coalition staff), Nathalie Paven (Transition House), Margo Smith (coalition staff), Gail Sullivan (coalition staff), and Jane Weiss (Help for Abused Women and Children). The name of the woman (or women) primarily responsible for each article appears at the end of the article and in the table of contents. However, the committee as a whole has had much discussion about each article and made some changes and rewrites as a group. Gail Sullivan and Jane Weiss took responsibility for getting the manual through the last grueling steps of rewriting, typesetting and printing.

There are many other women who took time and energy from their service groups and other commitments to assist this project. The following women provided invaluable assistance and hard work toward the creation of this manual: Bonnie Acker—graphics, layout and design; Nancy Andrews—typing and editing; Laurel Campbell (Equal Times)—typesetting; Trish Cannon—rewriting; Cindy Fascia—editing, rewriting and support; Marie Herbert—writing; Mary Quinn—comments; Margo Rey—writing; Renae Scott—comments and rewriting; Tish Sinclair—writing; Barbara Smith—editing, especially for cultural bias; Paula Tobin—suggestions; Betsy Warrior—revisions, suggestions and ideas.

We would also like to thank Curdina Hill, Ellen Pence, Renae Scott, Beverly Smith, Gloria Steinem and the Elizabeth Stone House staff for permission to use their articles; Marge Piercy and Ntozake Shange for permission to use their poetry; Ellen Shub for use of her photographs from which some graphics were drawn; and "Jane Doe" for the courage to write her letter.

We'd like to thank the Transition House parenting committee and Parents Anonymous for ideas on the child abuse section; the coalition staff for sympathy, support and understanding; and all of the many women from battered women's groups around Massachusetts who have taken time to give suggestions and support through the many months of this project.

In addition we'd like to thank *Equal Times* for donation of some of the typesetting.

from photo by Ellen Shub

Chapter I:

Violence Against Women And The Movement Against It

with no immediate cause

every 3 minutes a woman is beaten
every five minutes a
woman is raped/every ten minutes
a lil girl is molested
yet i rode the subway today
i sat next to an old man who
may have beaten his old wife
3 minutes ago or 3 days/30 years ago
he might have sodomized his
daughter but i sat there
cuz the young men on the train
might beat some young women
later in the day or tomorrow
i might not shut my door fast
enuf/push hard enuf
every 3 minutes it happens
some woman's innocence
rushes to her cheeks/pours from her mouth
like the betsy wetsy dolls have been torn
apart/their mouths
mensis red & split/every
three minutes a shoulder
is jammed through plaster & the oven door/
chairs push thru the rib cage/hot water or
boiling sperm decorate her body
i rode the subway today
& bought a paper from a
man who might
have held his old lady onto
a hot pressing iron/i dont know
maybe he catches lil girls in the
park & rips open their behinds
with steel rods/i cant decide
what he might have done i only
know every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes every 10 minutes/so
i bought the paper
looking for the announcement
the discovery/of the dismembered
woman's body/the
victims have not all been
identified/today they are
naked & dead/refuse to
testify/one girl out of 10's not
coherent/i took the coffee
& spit it up/i found an
announcement/not the woman's
bloated body in the river/floating
not the child bleeding in the
59th street corridor/not the baby
broken on the floor/
"there is some concern
that alleged battered women
might start to murder their
husbands & lovers with
no immediate cause"
i spit up   i vomit   i am screaming
we all have immediate cause
every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes
every 10 minutes
every day
women's bodies are found
in alleys & bedrooms/at the top of the stairs
before i ride the subway/buy a paper/drink
coffee/i must know/
have you hurt
a woman today
did you beat a woman today
throw a child cross a room
are the lil girl's panties
in yr pocket
did you hurt a woman today

i have to ask these obscene questions
the authorities require me to
establish
immediate cause

every three minutes
every five minutes
every ten minutes
every day

Ntozake Shange

Letter From A Battered Woman

The following is a letter from a battered woman who attended a presentation on battering:

You will never be able to realize how it felt to sit there looking like a well-dressed middle class woman knowing that you were talking about me. It was the very first time I have every heard anyone say that I wasn't wrong for being beaten!

You asked help from any woman who is subjected to this horrible form of physical abuse. You asked for anonymous case histories given to someone by the battered wife. I have no one to give a history to, as there isn't anyone who knows about the situation well enough to be confided in.

I will give you my own experiences at first hand and hope that it will be useful to you.

I am presently married to the man who beats me so I will have to remain unidentified.

There is so much to say. Most has never been said before. It is very difficult.

I am in my thirties and so is my husband. I have a high school education and am presently attending a local college trying to find the education I need for support. My husband is a college graduate and a professional in his field. We are both attractive people and for the most part respected and well-liked. We have three children and live in a middle class home with all the comforts one could possibly want.

I have everything, except life without fear.

For the most part of married life I have been periodically beaten by my husband. What do I mean by "beaten"? I mean those times when parts of my body have been hit violently and repeatedly causing painful bruises, swellings, bleeding wounds, unconsciousness, or any combination of those things.

Beating should be distinguished from being hit and shoved around, which I define as all other physical abuse which does not result in a beating.

And let me clarify what I mean when I refer to threats of abuse. I am not talking about a man warning me that he may lose control. I'm talking specifically about a fist shaking against my face or nose, a punching-bag jab at my shoulder, or any gesture which threatens me with the possibility of a beating.

I have had glasses thrown at me. I have been kicked in the abdomen when I was visibly pregnant. I have been kicked off the bed and hit while laying on the floor—while I was pregnant. I have been whipped, kicked and thrown, picked up and thrown down again. I have been punched and kicked in the head, chest, face and abdomen on numerous occasions.

I have been slapped for saying something about politics, having a different view about religion, for swearing, for crying, for wanting to have intercourse.

I have been threatened when I wouldn't do something I was told to do. I have been threatened when he's had a bad day—when he's had a good day.

I have been beaten, slapped and threatened when I have stated bitterly that I didn't like what he was doing with another woman.

Each time my husband has left the house and remained gone for days.

Few people have ever seen my black and blue face or swollen lips because I have always stayed indoors feeling ashamed.

I was never able to drive after one of these beatings, so I could not get myself to a hospital for care. I could never have left my young children alone and I certainly could not have left them alone even when I could have driven.

Hysteria sets in after a beating. This hysteria—the shaking and crying and mumbling—is not accepted by anyone so there has never been anyone to call.

My husband on a few occasions did call a day or so later to provide me with an excuse which I could use for returning to work, the grocery store, the dentist appointment, and so on. I used the excuses—a car accident, oral surgery, things like that.

Now the first response which I myself think of is "why didn't you seek help?"

I did. I went early in our marriage to a clergyman who after a few visits told me that my husband meant no real harm, he was just confused and felt insecure. I was to be more tolerant and understanding. Most important, I was to forgive him the beatings just as Christ had forgiven me from the cross. I did.

Things continued. I turned this time to a doctor. I was given little pills to relax me and told to take things a little easier. I was "just too nervous."

I turned to a friend and when her husband found out he accused me of either making things up or exaggerating the situation. She was told to stay away from me. (She didn't but she could no longer help.)

I turned to a professional family guidance agency. I was told there that he needed help and I should find a way to control the incidents. I couldn't control the beating—that was his decision. I was asked to defend myself against the suspicion that I wanted to be hit. I invited a beating. Good God! Did the Jews invite themselves to be slaughtered in Germany?

I did go to doctors on two occasions. One asked me what I had done to provoke him and the other asked if we had made up yet.

I called the police one time. They not only didn't respond to the call, they called several hours later to ask if things had "settled down." I could have been dead by then!

I have nowhere to go if it happens again. No one wants a woman with three children. Even if someone is kind enough, they wouldn't want to become involved in what is commonly referred to as a "domestic situation."

Everyone I have gone to for help has somehow wanted to blame me and vindicate my husband. I can see it there between the words and at the end of sentences. The clergyman, the doctors, the counselor, the police—every one of them has found a way to vindicate my husband.

No one has to "provoke" a wife beater. He'll hit when he's ready and for whatever reason he wishes.

I may be his excuse but I have never been the reason.

I know that I do not want to be hit. I know, too, that I will be beaten again unless I can find a way out for myself and my children. I am terrified for them also.

As a married woman I have no recourse but to remain in the situation which is causing me to be painfully abused.

I have suffered physical and emotional battering and spiritual rape all because the social structure of my world says I cannot do anything about a man who wants to beat me. Society says that I must be committed to a man without any opportunity for an education and earning capacity. That my children must be subjected to the emotional battering caused when they see their mother's beaten face or hear my screams in the middle of the night.

I know that I have to get out but when you have nowhere to go you know that you go on your own and with no support. I have to be ready for that. I have to be ready to completely support myself and the children and provide a decent environment.

I pray that I can do that before I am murdered in my own home.

I've learned that no one believed me and I have only the hope that I can get away before it is too late.

I've learned also that the doctors, the police, the clergy and friends will excuse my husband for distorting my face but won't forgive me for looking bruised and broken.

The greatest tragedy is that I am still praying and there is no human person to listen. Being beaten is a terrible thing but more terrible if you are not equipped to fight back.

I recall an occasion on which I tried to defend myself. I actually tore a pair of pajamas. He produced them to a relative as proof that I had done something terribly wrong. The fact that I was sitting with several raised spots on my head hidden by hair, a swollen lip that was bleeding, and a severely damaged cheek with a blood clot which caused a dimple didn't even matter. The only thing that mattered was that I tore his pajamas. It didn't matter that I tore them in self-defense.

This is such an earthly position for a woman to find herself in. I would guess that it is incomprehensible for anyone who has not experienced a like situation. I find it difficult to believe myself.

Another point is that while a husband can beat, slap or threaten his wife, there are "good days" and this is what causes most people to wonder, why does she stay.

The good days tend to wear away the effect of the beating. They tend to cause the wife to put aside the trauma and look to the good. First, because there is nothing else to do. Second, because there is nowhere to go, and no one else to turn to. Third, because the defeat is the beating and the hope is that it will not happen again.

A loving woman like myself always hopes that it will not happen again. When it does, she simply hopes again, until it becomes obvious after a third beating that there is no hope.

That is when you turn from yourself outwardly and hope again to find an answer. You begin to plan for yourself.

The third beating may be too late. Several of the times that I have been abused, I have been bewildered that I remained alive. Imagine that I have been thrown to a very hard slate floor several times, kicked in the abdomen, the head, and the chest and still remained alive.

What determines who is lucky and who isn't? I could have been dead a long time ago, had I been hit the wrong way. My baby would have been dead, aborted or deformed had I been kicked the wrong way. What has saved me?

I don't know. I know that it has happened and that each night I dread what may be the final strike which will kill me and leave my children motherless.

I believe that is why I am telling someone all that I have to relate. There is more, much more, and I have tried to keep it short but I know your program will be a strong and a much needed contribution to the community.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that the emotion which I have revealed is not a detriment to your purpose. I have tried several times to hand compose this letter but it wouldn't come properly. The writing was shaky. The typing is not very good either, although I am a good typist.

The truth is that I am emotional about what has happened to me because it is so much more real than I can ever describe.

I have tried to give you a little of both the physical and mental abuse which comes out of a man who has not the self-orientation to combat the presence of a woman in his life.

I would like to do more but that would take a book—and there is no market because there are no ears.

Thank you,
Jane Doe

Myths About Woman Abuse

Introduction

Until recently very few women admitted to being battered, or even to having been battered some time in their pasts. Battering within the context of a family or household was considered a "private matter" and was effectively "hushed up" by courts, law enforcement officials, social service agencies, professionals such as psychiatrists, clergy, as well as those directly involved in the violence. In the last few years, however, we've seen a good deal of publicity about battered "wives." Scholarship in the area from psychologists and sociologists alike has been published. Some of this work is good. However, much of it is inconclusive and reflective of the same prejudices and stereotypes existent in our society about the roles of men and women—particularly within the context of the family. Rather than attack the scholarship in the area, we will briefly expose some of the most common myths and stereotypes about battered women, relying on our years of experience in shelters and support groups for battered women and our exchange of ideas with the women who have sought our help.

* * *

Myth #1: "Battering" overstates the case. Few women get beaten, though maybe a lot of them get slapped around a little.

Some women do get slapped or hit, and leave the violent situation immediately. But most often battering escalates once it starts. By the time a woman calls for services, generally such escalation has occurred.

Battering brutally violates a woman's rights over her body and her life. It can involve severe, aggravated beatings or threats of such beatings; both physical and mental torture; use of weapons; and often sexual assault. In our experience with battered women, we have been aware of several common characteristics. It is not usually an isolated act, but rather continual acts of physical violence and emotional harassment and humiliation. Once the violence has begun, it continues and it escalates. Men who batter women usually deny their behavior both to the woman and to themselves. In fact, in some cases the mental harassment includes this denial and threats of having the woman "put away" for her craziness.

Battering may end in murder. A Kansas Police Department study found that in 85% of the cases of domestic homicide, the police were summoned at least once before the killing occurred. In 50% of the cases, police had been called 5 or more times before it happened.

* * *

Myth #2: Battering is a "family matter."

No act which can leave a woman permanently injured physically or mentally, or result in her death is a "family matter." Assault is assault, rape is rape, murder is murder, regardless of the relationship between the people. These are criminal acts. Arguing in such cases that the "privacy" of the family must be maintained can mean injury, death, or virtual imprisonment, to many battered women.

There is a general reluctance to interfere in family relationships. Women have been encouraged by family, clergy, lawyers, and other "professionals" to remain in violent homes in order to preserve the family unit. Recently, police and social service agencies have begun to re-educate themselves about domestic violence, and are attempting to deal with it in different ways. Recognizing that violence within or without the family is unjustifiable, life threatening and criminal behavior is the first step toward really dealing with the issue. Until we stop isolating violence within families from other violent crimes, we will be encouraging thousands of women to stay in an environment that may eventually kill them.

* * *

Myth #3: Battering only happens in "problem" families.

The idea of the "problem" family is immediately suspect since it presupposes the existence of non-problem or "normal" families in the majority of homes. The concept of the stable, happy family masks the reality of the large number of people whose family lives are neither stable nor happy, ignores the rising number of people who choose not to live within a nuclear family, and ignores the statistics on woman abuse. This myth also ignores the fact that our society has tolerated—even encouraged—violence against women on a wide-scale basis through media images of women as victims, through the socialization and reinforcement of male privilege and through the refusal to treat violence against women as any other violent crime. Failure to identify the violence by men against women as being closely linked with the unequal standards between the sexes only serves to keep women in subordinate positions. By encouraging male dominance and reinforcing stereotyped role models of the sexes our whole society and not just individuals or individual families is responsible for the violence.

Furthermore, the myth that only problem families experience violence also encourages social service workers, police and court personnel to look for "reasons" and family "problems" to explain away the violence. The notion that alcoholic or drug-abusive men batter because of their drug problem is shattered by the evidence that such men batter both when they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs and when they are rational and sober. For years women have been encouraged to seek professional help for their alcoholism, men's alcoholism, their failure to make a successful marriage, or "paranoia" about being abused. More and more women are now rejecting such advice and recognizing that the abuser has problems controlling his violent tendencies. While he may need professional help, a woman cannot make that decision for him or endure the violence while hoping that he will make that decision.

* * *

Myth #4: It is only low-income and working class families who experience violence.

Many have assumed that battering occurs only within low-income or working class families, or within particular racial or ethnic families. Scholarship in this area and our direct experience show that women from every kind of racial, social, ethnic and economic background have been battered. Women have been battered by doctors, lawyers, dock workers, judges, school teachers, ministers, cab drivers and every other variety of worker. Unfortunately statistics dealing with woman abuse have been accumulated and published primarily through public agencies such as city hospitals, police departments, social service agencies and the courts. Therefore statistics sometimes erroneously suggest that certain kinds of women are battered by certain kinds of men.

Since middle class and upper middle class women often have other options open to them, e.g., staying with friends who can afford to take them in, staying in a hotel for a couple of nights, etc., they are less likely to seek assistance from public agencies such as those listed above or from emergency shelters and other service groups. Many middle class women also are afraid of damaging a successful husband's career, and are pressured by family, friends and others to keep up appearances "at all cost—especially for the children." Others may have the kind of skills that would give them greater access to work and financial independence. Of the middle class women who do seek assistance from battered women service groups, many have spent years working in the home and do not have marketable skills; they suddenly find themselves without any means of support except A.F.D.C.

Relying on statistics from public agencies, therefore, can mislead readers and distort the reality about violence against women cutting across all races, all social, economic and ethnic groups. It is analogous to compiling statistics on what kinds of people use childcare facilities by collecting statistics from Title XX or other government-funded programs. We would be misled into thinking that wealthy and middle class people did not use daycare facilities, tutors, etc.

* * *

Myth #5: Battered women constitute a particular and easily definable group of women.

"Battered women" seems to give rise to the stereotype of a passive woman, between 20 and 35 years old, who is unemployed, has 2 or more children, and lives with her husband who is alcoholic. The facts, however, indicate that "the" battered woman is us—any of us. Battered women are as diverse as women are. There is no particular kind of woman who is likely to be battered any more than a kind likely to be raped.

A battered woman may be elderly, teen-aged, or middle-aged. She may represent an upper, middle or working class background, any race or culture. She may work inside or outside the home as a housewife, teacher, prostitute, student or laborer. She fits no easily-definable pattern or stereotype.

Furthermore, just as there are diverse kinds of women who are battered, there are many different kinds of relationships in which abuse occurs. "Wife abuse" has become a fairly acceptable term, but it distorts reality. Battering does not occur exclusively within a marital relationship. Women are battered by male lovers, relatives, neighbors and strangers. Prostitutes are often battered by their pimps, and sometimes by a lover as well—not to mention customers who get sick gratification from beating prostitutes. Older women may be battered by sons or other younger relatives as easily as by their husbands. Lesbians who are coming out of heterosexual relationships have sometimes been battered by the men with whom they've been involved.

It is therefore unrealistic to attempt to deal with woman abuse by defining women who are battered or the relationships in which they've been battered in narrow terms. The more we work with battered women, the more we realize this and try to deal with it by being open to any number of possibilities, and supportive of all women who have been abused, regardless of the circumstances or the people involved.

* * *

Myth #6: She asked for it or she wanted it.

Of all the myths about battering this is probably the most degrading and insensitive to women. Yet many battered women have been accused of asking for the violence or deserving it by abusive men, and by those from whom they sought help, e.g., clergy, therapists, social workers, police, etc. Many have been questioned as to what they did to provoke such violence from a husband or lover, and counseled to look to themselves for reasons and/or blame for violence, and to change their own behavior in order to avoid abuse. This has encouraged many women to stay in a violent home for years trying to discover just what they do to provoke violence, thus facing, in some cases, daily abuse and harassment.

Similar to the provocation theory is the Freudian approach to violence against women. This suggests that women like to be dominated and even physically abused, and blames the woman for the violence rather than the man. The fact that the woman considered masochistic is trying to escape the violent man is ignored by those who favor this theory; the difficult problems that she must deal with in leaving the abuser are also ignored.

* * *

Myth #7: It can't really be that bad or she wouldn't stay (or, isn't she really a masochist after all?).

The assumption that the violence is not serious or the woman would leave immediately fails to deal realistically with the problems a woman must face immediately and long-term once she has left a violent man. Many women—particularly older women—are economically dependent on the men to whom they are married or with whom they live. For these women—especially those with children—the decision to leave a man who is their and their children's sole or primary means of support has an enormous impact on their lives. Furthermore, until 1974 when shelters began to open, there were few places a woman could turn to for refuge and assistance. Police officers were reluctant to intervene, social workers often encouraged reconciliation in order to save the family, and public housing authorities were (and are) unwilling to consider women in crisis as emergency cases. Even with the growing number of shelters for battered women and their children it is difficult to keep up with the great number of women in need of refuge. Most shelters are always full and rely on over-flow housing. Even if a woman is able to get shelter she still has to worry about where she'll go from there, how she'll support herself and her children, where they'll live, etc. On top of all this she must also begin to deal with her feelings about what she has suffered, and her fear of further violence and harassment.

If she gets a job she'll probably make considerably less than the man she left. Furthermore, she'll need to pay for day care *if* those services are available where she lives. Finally she must deal with the loneliness of leaving old connections and with family, friends and professionals who encourage reconciliation "for the sake of the children." With all these pressures it is little wonder that women need time to decide whether or not and when to leave a violent home.

* * *

Myth #8: The cycle of violence theory.

Many professionals and scholars suggest that there is a pattern to violence, that boys from violent homes will grow up to be batterers, girls, to be victims. What this theory fails to address is the large number of women who are battered by men who came from non-violent families, and women who came from non-violent families but become trapped in violent relationships. Another facet of the cycle of violence theory is the suggestion that battered women batter their children. As a result of this common belief many battered women *are* afraid to allege violence in divorce or abuse proceedings for fear of losing custody of their children. In fact some women have lost custody because of the violence of the men from whom they were attempting to escape.

We feel that there has been wide scale confusion about two separate and distinct issues, confusion that tends to downplay or ignore violence against women as a secondary or less important issue and tends to malign battered women in general. There is no evidence that battered women are more likely to abuse their children than women who have not been battered, and our direct experience contradicts the theory that battered women batter their children because they have been battered.

* * *

Conclusion

Myths that depict women as choosing, enjoying or irrationally submitting to violence affect our ideas about, and our attitudes toward, all battered women. These myths are not only insulting and degrading to the individual women who have been abused, but also ultimately degrading to all women. Moreover, they negatively affect the provision of services to such a woman and undermine her attempts to take control of her life. Convenient explanations for family violence often feed into the common prejudices against battered women and undermine the enormous gains made by women through self help and awareness. They play a part in keeping women in servile dependent roles. Rather than looking to find simple reasons or theories to account for domestic violence, our time is better spent supporting and encouraging a victim of such violence so that she can gain back her self-respect and take control of her life in order to leave the violence and make a new life for herself and her children.

Special thanks to the Welsh Women's Aid for their ideas and support.

—Chris Butler

Rape Poem

There is no difference between being raped
and being pushed down a flight of cement steps
except that the wounds also bleed inside.

There is no difference between being raped
and being run over by a truck
except that afterward men ask if you enjoyed it.

There is no difference between being raped
and being bitten on the ankle by a rattlesnake
except that people ask if your skirt was short
and why you were out alone anyhow.

There is no difference between being raped
and going head first through a windshield
except that afterward you are afraid
not of cars
but half the human race.

The rapist is your boyfriend's brother.

He sits beside you in the movies eating popcorn.
Rape fattens on the fantasies of the normal male
like a maggot in garbage.

Fear of rape is a cold wind blowing
all of the time on a woman's hunched back.
Never to stroll alone on a sand road through pinewoods
never to climb a trail across a bald mountain
without that aluminum in the mouth
when I see a man climbing toward me.

Never to open the door to a knock
without that razor just grazing the throat.
The fear of the dark side of hedges,
the back seat of the car, the empty house
rattling keys like a snake's warning.
The fear of the smiling man
in whose pocket is a knife.
The fear of the serious man
in whose fist is locked hatred.

All it takes to cast a rapist is to be able to see your body
as jackhammer, as blowtorch, as adding-machine-gun.
All it takes is hating that body
your own, your self, your muscle that softens to flab.

All it takes is to push what you hate,
what you fear onto the soft alien flesh.
To bucket out invincible as a tank
armored with treads without senses
to possess and punish in one act,
to rip up pleasure, to murder those who dare
live in the leafy flesh open to love.

—Marge Piercy

Sexism And Patriarchy

Sexism: *Any attitude, action or inaction by an individual or institution, which subordinates a person or group because of her/their sex. Sexism is based on the presumption of power of men.*

Patriarchy: *According to Webster's dictionary—"social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line."*

To go a step further than Webster, patriarchy grants men power over women in general because of their supremacy as fathers in the family structure. This power is individualized: each man has power over his wife. Though this power comes from the patriarchal family structure, it is replicated in relationships outside marriage as well. A man often has psychological and social power over a woman with whom he's in a relationship even though there is no "legal" relationship (i.e., marriage). White male power is also institutionalized: women have no power to control government, legislation, media, church, business, etc. As a result of **women's lack of social, political and personal power,** women are virtually invisible throughout recorded history. This does not mean that women didn't make significant contributions to 'progress' but that without power they were generally unrecognized (it also means that the notion of progress itself was male defined—technology, war, etc. . . .).

In order to understand the position of women in our society today, we should look to the past.

His-Story of Battering and Marriage

The following section on the history of women in marriage was excerpted from R. Emerson and Russell P. Dobash's article, "Wives: The Appropriate Victims of Marital Violence" which appeared in *Victimology Magazine* in the Sept. 30, 1977 issue. Quotes in this section refer to authors quoted in that article and the page on which the quote appeared. The focus is only on Western Civilization: white dominated cultures from which this society derives many of its values, laws and attitudes. Other cultures, such as Asian, African, Native American, and Latin have different histories. Some have evidence of a matriarchal heritage. However, the patriarchal system which is responsible for the oppression of women is world-wide and crosses most, if not all, cultures.

Reputedly, one of the first laws of marriage was proclaimed by the Roman emperor, Romulus, in 753 B.C. It proclaimed that married women were "to conform themselves entirely to the temper of their husbands and the husbands to rule their wives as necessary and inseparable possessions." (O'Faolain and Martines 1973: 53). A wife was obligated to obey her husband and he was given the legal right and the moral obligation to control and punish her for any "misbehavior," including adultery, drinking wine, attending public games without his permission or appearing unveiled in public.

Christianity also embraced the hierarchical family structure and celebrated the subordination of wives to their husbands, as in Peter, 3:1 ". . . wives be in subjection to your own husbands . . ." Wives were to obey, but the Christian attitude was that their subjection should not be achieved through force but through an adherence to a moral order which made obedience sacred. The law of marriage (I Corinthians, 7) and the prescriptions for conjugal duties (Ephesians, 5; Titus, 2:4-5) stated that love and obedience constituted the proper role for a wife.

Under English Common Law a married woman lost all of her civil rights, had almost no legal status, and became the chattel of her husband. The right of the husband to chastise his wife was considered a natural part of his responsibilities. In 1763, Blackstone wrote, "The husband also, by the old law, might give his wife moderate correction. For, as he is to answer for her misbehaviours, the law thought it reasonable to entrust him with his power of restraining her by domestic chastisement . . ."

All of the legal systems of Europe, England and early America supported a husband's rights to beat his wife and so did the community norms. In 18th Century France, for example, it was considered appropriate for a husband to chastise his wife for reasons such as assertion of her independence, wanting to regain control of her property after marriage, adultery, or even suspected infidelity (Castan 1976), but the beatings were supposed to conform to the rules of legitimate punishment. The chastisement of wives, like that of children, was to be restricted to "blows, thumps, kicks or punches on the back . . . which did not leave any marks . . . "

It was not until the 17th century that the husband's power of correction over his wife even began to be doubted: in 1871, it was declared that, "the privilege, ancient though it be, to beat her with a stick, to pull her hair, choke her, spit in her face or kick her about the floor, or to inflict upon her other indignities, is not now acknowledged by our law" (Eisenberg and Micklow, 1974:6). However, so little was done to bring about any meaningful change in the daily lives of women that by 1910 the suffragettes made the issue of wife beating one of their platforms (McLaren, 1909:15-18).

The above information focuses primarily on control of women by their husbands, yet it is indicative of women's general powerlessness because women were allowed no alternative to male-controlled families. They were passed from father to husband, always under the control of men. Women could have had no power in the public sphere if they had none in the private/personal sphere. Though laws have changed, the reality of violence against women remains the same, and women's position in society continues today to be defined in large part by their role in the family.

Family

The traditionally "appropriate" role for women, as defined by white middle class standards, has been in the home, raising and nurturing children, taking care of and shopping for the home and keeping their husbands happy. This role is expected of women without consideration of whether they truly want to be housewives and raise children. In the family, women's role has been as nurturers and caretakers of husbands and children. Women are responsible, with TV and public schools, for socializing children so that they will maintain the values and ideas of the established order. As part of their role as socializers, women must teach their children to fit into existing sex roles and enforce the rules of behavior which result from those roles. This necessitates women being convinced of their own inferiority. Unfortunately, because of their own socialization, many women believe and uphold ideas which restrict and limit them.

Family life is different for women of differing cultures and classes. For example, a Black woman must teach her children survival skills such as how to defend themselves, where they can and can't go and to behave well enough to not incur the attention or anger of white adults —lessons which white children wouldn't need to know. Girls who grow up in working class families of any race might be tougher, stronger and more independent than those who grow up in middle class homes. However, the standard, based on white middle class ideals, is held out for all to be judged against: boys must learn to be tough, independent, smart and aggressive men; girls must learn to be sexually attractive, emotional, inferior and passive women.

Because women are defined primarily as housewives/mothers, women are considered wholly responsible for whatever happens in the family. If the children don't turn out right (by society's standards), or if the marriage ends in divorce even if it's a result of battering, the woman is blamed. If a woman has to work to support her family, she is "neglecting" them; if she wants to see her children succeed, she will be called "too overbearing." In short, she is often in a no-win situation.

Another aspect of women's role in the family is meeting the sexual demands of their husbands. Until quite recently, men's "conjugal rights" (total access, upon demand, to their wives' bodies) have been absolutely upheld legally and attitudinally. The concept of men's "conjugal rights" (women have no equivalent right to demand sex) is a holdover of men's complete ownership of women. While any forced or coercive sexual activity is rape, regardless of the relationship between the man and woman, it is only since 1978 that women anywhere in the U.S. have been able to press charges against their husbands for rape; and to date, only a few states recognize marital rape.

This reality, which many battered women have in common, is one of the most oppressive aspects of marriage for many women. Yet equally startling is that all of women's work in the family, as caretakers, counselors, childrearers and so forth, is unpaid.

Economic Dependence and Inequality

Women's work as childrearers and houseworkers is taken for granted and is unpaid because it is seen as natural and instinctive, as an outgrowth of women's ability to give birth. Traditionally, many women have worked full time in the home for their entire adult lives. Without a wage for this work, women are totally dependent on the men with whom they live for their survival and the support of their children.

Many women of color and working class white women have had to work outside the home for many years, because their men were not able to earn enough money to support a whole family, because they were single and their families couldn't provide economic support, and a variety of other reasons. However, because of their class and race, they have generally been denied jobs which paid enough to live on, and as a result some were economically dependent on men anyway, in order to support their children.

Women's work in the home has tremendous economic value, which benefits both the individual men with whom they live and the society as a whole. In 1970, Chase Manhattan Bank conducted a survey of employees for an exhibit entitled, "What's a Wife Worth?" They estimated that women work about 100 hours a week at a value of $256. Consider the cost to their husbands or the company, if women were to be paid for this labor, especially at today's inflated prices! Moreover, women have none of the rights or protections of workers in the labor force. In the home, women work 2½ times the normal work schedule, receive no holidays or days off, are often expected to cook and clean and provide childcare during their husband's vacation and receive *no* pay (room and board is not pay). Widows are made acutely aware of the unfairness of this system, when they receive no benefits from the work they have done and sometimes no benefits from their husbands' salaries.

> *"Although woman has performed much of the labor of the world, her industry and economy have been the very means of increasing her degradation. Not being free, the results of her labor have gone to build up and sustain the very class that has perpetuated this injustice. Even in the family, where we should naturally look for the truest conditions, woman has always been robbed of the fruits of her own toil . . . Taught that the fruits of her industry belonged to others, she has seen man enter into every avocation most suitable to her, while she, the uncomplaining drudge of the household, condemned to the severest labor, has been systematically robbed of her earnings, which have gone to build up her master's power, and she has found herself in the condition of the slave, deprived of the results of her own labor . . ."*
>
> *Susan B. Anthony*
> ***Woman: The Great Unpaid Laborer of the World,*** *c. 1848*

More and more women are joining the workforce, out of economic need and/or a desire for fulfillment and broader horizons. 50% of women over 16 work outside the home in addition to whatever work they do at home. The Governor's Advisory Committee on Children and Families estimated that in 1980, 53% of all Mass. women worked outside the home. It is only recently, with more white middle class women joining the labor force, that the difficulties of combining two jobs, that of mother/housekeeper with that of wage-earner has begun to be looked at. When a woman works outside the home, she is still largely or solely responsible for childcare and home maintenance. Though it has recently become noteworthy that men are now "helping their wives" with childcare and agreeing to do a share of laundry and dishes, responsibility still lies primarily with women. Articles have been written about 'house-husbands' — men who've chosen to stay at home with the children fulltime, yet we don't see articles lauding 'housewives' — the millions of women who do housework every day. Women who continue to have great difficulty finding reasonably priced day care for their children, and women who work evening shifts often have no childcare available. Only 19% of those women needing childcare in 1978 could find openings.* Though a few workplaces have established policies like 'flex-time' (flexible working hours), most women still have to arrange their children's lives and their housework around an inflexible work schedule. These facts can be seen as indicative of the lack of commitment to making it possible for women to be a stable and supported part of the workforce. Women continue to be seen as supplementary — there to do work which men don't want to, for wages most men won't accept.

Women in the workforce tend to be tracked into jobs which are extensions of their "caretaker" role at home: housecleaning, teaching, nursing and other low-paying service jobs. Of women in the workforce, 35% are clerical workers, 17% are waitresses and other service workers, and 16% are in professional jobs (mostly nurses, teachers, social workers, etc.), 12% are machine operators (factory and transportation), and the rest are sales clerks, household workers and laborers.** 80% of all women workers work in "female" segregated occupations (i.e., as waitresses, secretaries, sales clerks) and women earn 59% of what men earn.*** And this figure is *lower* that it was 10 years ago! From these figures, it's obvious that very few women are in jobs with any power.

It continues to be difficult for women to break into traditionally male jobs which pay higher wages in spite of so-called "equal employment opportunities" and publicized programs for "non-traditional jobs for women." Women are at a severe disadvantage in the workplace.

Because of lack of economic possibilities, combined with other factors of women's oppression, a large number of women have had to earn their livings as prostitutes. This, the "oldest profession" for women, is based on the open exploitation of women's bodies by men. Many prostitutes are financially exploited and physically abused by their pimps who take most of their money: although they receive a wage, like married women they are often economically dependent on men.

A study of 150,000 women conducted by the National Commission on Working Women (reported in the Boston Globe 5/29/79) points out the problem. They found that the average American working woman describes herself as frustrated in a dead-end job with no chance of advancement or training. She's underpaid, underutilized, given little or no respect for her work. She's troubled by inadequate childcare and obsessed with guilt because she's not at home with her children. Yet she can't afford to quit because her income is vital to her survival. If married, her husband is of almost no help with household chores. If single, she often works far below her educational level, and finds it difficult to cover the expenses of living alone. The time and money which would be required if she were to marry and have children frightens her. Her health and security benefits are inadequate; she would like further education, but she doesn't have the time or money for it. Fifty to 55% of all women workers say they have no leisure time.

The economic system under which we live gains from and is invested in women's unpaid work in the home and low status in the workforce. By convincing women that work done in the home is their "duty" and that work outside the home is "extra" and that women shouldn't interfere with men making their "more important" wages, women are kept from demanding the rights that are theirs. The constant trivialization and dismissal of women's demands for equal pay, equal rights and equal access for all women to decent jobs is perpetuated by

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*****Family Circle*** *survey*

***Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1979*

****U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Consumer Income* those who have the most to lose by women's liberation from secondary status. White upper class men who own the companies and corporations in which women work, need the subjugation of women in order to continue to make profits and maintain their privilege.

Moreover, women's economic dependence on men and lack of economic equality in general is a major factor in the continuation of violence against women. Battered women cannot leave violent men if they can't support themselves and their children. Women are often in jeopardy using public transportation to and from evening or graveyard workshifts or can't even take a job because of the lack of transportation available. And women's low status in the workforce and lack of power makes them very vulnerable to sexual harassment from supervisors and co-workers.

Violence Against Women

There are many kinds of violence which women suffer. As Diane Russell, coordinator of the U.S. delegation to the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women stated:

> *"Many different ways have been devised for keeping women subordinated to men in patriarchal societies. Footbinding was used by the Chinese to cripple women for over 1,000 years. Purdah, the practice of secluding women from contact with men outside of the immediate family, frequently accomplished by making women prisoners in their own homes, is still widespread today among the Muslim populations of the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. Clitoridectomy (excision of the clitoris) is still practiced on millions of pre-puberty girls in Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Guinea, and Ethiopia. Rape and assault, both within the family and outside of it, are two of the most crude and brutal ways in which western patriarchal societies seek to maintain the sexual status quo. (These methods are, however, not confined to the West, but appear to be common to all patriarchal societies.)"*

In addition to the forms of violence Russell mentions, women are subjected to medical violence such as forced sterilization (directed primarily against Latin, Native American and Black women), lobotomies, and unnecessary hysterectomies. Violence in the media runs from the extreme of pornographic magazines and movies (such as *Snuff* which depicts the actual dismemberment and murder of a woman) to the commonplace brutalization of women shown daily on TV. Women are subjected to harassment and threats of violence in the workplace, on the street and in the home.

Women who are in prisons and mental institutions (and most of the population of mental institutions is women), are subjected to abusive and violent treatment. Many women who are institutionalized are there because they were victims of violence. One study done by the female warden of Cook County Jail in Chicago, shows that over 40% of the women imprisoned for murder or manslaughter had killed men who had continuously battered them. Many women (perhaps most), who are in mental institutions have been victims of incest, rape and other forms of violence. They are often there because of the violence they've suffered: women are made to feel crazy because this society condones these abusive crimes against them. Institutionalization of women resulting from their experience of violence is injury added to injury.

Violence is used by men to exert their power and control over women. Men are taught to treat women as objects, particularly as sex objects, which makes women 'appropriate victims' for harassment and violence, often done in the name of fun or sexual pleasure. Violence such as rape and sexual harassment is not a result of uncontrollable sexual feelings or need. It is an attack, a means of conquering and controlling a woman.

Men are also taught that their wives are their 'property.' This view of women as property allows them to feel justified in exerting their control over their wives' behavior, dress, housekeeping, sexuality and anything else. They also feel justified in taking their frustrations out on the women who are their 'property.' Wife beating, then, establishes a husband's control and authority over his wife; it's intended to force her into submission, if she is stepping 'out of line,' or simply to remind her that he is boss. In a similar way, sexual harassment on the job establishes the male supervisor's or co-worker's control over a female worker's behavior at work.

Violence against women controls all women indirectly through fear of attack; all women share the fear of violence, on a conscious or unconscious level. The threat of violence makes women fearful of being independent, assertive and self-possessed women; the message is that if you stand up for yourself, you might get knocked down. Fear of violence restricts women's movement and freedom; it keeps women isolated in their homes, where they are often less safe than anywhere else. It keeps women out of the workplace for fear of harassment or sexual coercion, and thereby reinforces women's economic dependence on men. Fear of violence often keeps women in violent or otherwise destructive relationships because they are unable to protect themselves, and the abuse they've suffered seriously undercuts their self-confidence and self-worth. Thus women sometimes stay because the violence which is known may be less frightening than that which is unknown.

As a result, violence against women restricts women's daily lives; its threat also deters women from challenging the male supremacy which inhibits our freedom. The violence in our lives is reflected, even exaggerated, in what we see in the media. Violence against women in the media is one point in the spectrum of negative images of women which we are fed.

Images in the Media

Images of women in the media run from that of the housewife whose most important concern is the ring around her husband's collar to the extreme of women enjoying brutalization, being bound and gagged, raped and even killed as portrayed in hard core pornography.

Women are sexually objectified in the media. We see commercials showing a woman draped across the hood of a Cadillac, a woman in lowcut evening gown selling whiskey, a woman in a bikini selling harvesting equipment and so on. In none of these scenes does the woman have anything to do with the product being sold, but in all of them is the suggestion that a man cannot only buy the car, the liquor or the farm equipment, but can buy the woman and her sexuality as well. Women in movies and TV shows are generally shown as stereotyped sex objects. They are all 'beautiful' by a narrowly defined, white middle class notion of beauty; they tend toward being little girlish or sultry or sexy (or both), are always waiting for men's sexual advances and are passive recipients of men's attention. When a woman is shown to be aggressive she is quickly put in her place by a man who is more aggressive, supporting a male myth that every woman wants only to be conquered by a man stronger than herself.

Women and men are sold an image of what women ought to be. Women should be white, middle-class, young, thin, confident (but not too assertive) and have no underarm, mouth, vaginal or other smells. At various points the ideal is taller or thinner or blonde or brunette or more 'feminine' or more 'masculine.' The ideal is constantly (though minimally) changing, just to keep all women striving to fit the ideal. Women of color have traditionally been completely excluded by virtue of their invisibility on TV, in movies and other media. The message is clear: 'you cannot possibly even try to attain the ideal; you will never be good enough, never be woman enough.' Recently, more women of color have been visible in the media, especially in commercials, selling products directed particularly to Third World women, such as shampoo, cosmetics, etc. Yet it is still limited enough, still 'otherized' enough, that women of color continue to be excluded from any possibility of fitting the image of beautiful and 'real' women.

Women spend millions of dollars on cosmetics, clothes, hygiene products, household goods and innumerable other consumer products to keep up with the current image of what women ought to be and ought to do, yet women are caught on a treadmill trying to catch up with an impossibility in appearance, competence, ease and happiness. It is a set-up for disillusionment and self-blame; if life isn't as easy as it appears on TV, that's women's own fault. This is particularly destructive to women who haven't got the money to compete with the images, to women who seldom, if ever, see women of their race or culture represented, and to mothers who see motherhood portrayed as a snap of the finger or toss of the snack cakes, rather than the difficult and time-consuming work that it is.

Women are often stereotyped in the media: 'not too bright,' silly, overly vain, etc. They are either concerned with their clothes, hair appearance, etc., in order to attract ('trap') men or, if they already have men, are concerned to keep and take care of them, and to take care of their children. Even when women are shown in more "current" roles, as single women or working women, they are still portrayed as wanting men and men's sexual attention more than anything; they are men's competitors only to a point, at which they give in to the—stronger, bigger, greater—men. Particularly in commercials, women are portrayed in insulting fashion. Women talk to little men in toilet bowls, bald giants who fly through their (dirty) kitchen windows, dance through impeccably clean living rooms in chiffon and high heels singing to their furniture polish, or dance in disco line as they cross the street in their shining new pantyhose. They are saved by men with wondrous products to suit their every need or they turn the heads of every man on the street by dazzling them with their newly bought goods.

Even more destructive than other images of women, is the amount of violence against women in the media. In many movies and TV dramas, violence against women is glorified and equated with sexual excitation for men. Women are portrayed as helpless, passive, even willing victims. We often see previews of TV shows or movies with a woman's face frozen in terror; in the show we see her unable to fight as she is being raped, assaulted or murdered. The plot, usually a struggle between the man who is attacker and the man who is rescuer, is heightened by, and sometimes secondary to, the sexual excitement surrounding the graphic rapes and murders. The victims often have no identities; they are disposable objects in the fight between two men. The murders and attacks shown are often justified, as the victim is revealed to have been a prostitute or a woman out at night without a man to protect her. Unfortunately, the amount of violence, particularly acts against women, is increasing in prime time TV and mainstream movies, as people become numbed to the horror, and more comfortable with violence against women as an acceptable form of entertainment.

Pornography is more overt and extreme than the violence against women portrayed in the mainstream movies and TV dramas. Yet, the message is largely the same: men's violence toward women is normal, ordinary almost acceptable (in pornography it is completely acceptable) and women don't/can't fight back, are perhaps even enjoying their brutalization. Pornography objectifies women to an extreme degree; its essence is the degradation of women. Ninety percent of the pornography market is geared to white, middle-class, heterosexual men's tastes. "Pornography," writes Andrea Dworkin, "not only encourages and promotes the belief in victim pleasure, but has as its theory that men cannot 'abuse' women sexually. And in pornography, where the woman is sadistic, it is only because the man has not been cruel enough. In the end, all women can't get enough, all are only satisfied by cruelty . . ." According to Susan Brownmiller, author of *Against Our Will*, "There cannot be 'equality' in pornography . . . for it, like rape, is a male invention, designed to dehumanize women . . . Pornography is the undiluted essence of anti-female propaganda."

Because pornography promotes the belief that women want to be abused, that such degradation and abuse is acceptable and even pleasurable to women, pornography incites and perpetuates men's violence against women. It is not 'sexually liberating' nor acceptable 'adult fun.' Pornography is, in fact, a business; a very lucrative business which produces millions in profits through exploitation of women and, more recently, children.

Media, whether pornography, TV, movies or magazines, is designed to sell. It sells ideas, such as women's sexual objectification, or the 'ideal woman' image and what is acceptable behavior for women. It therefore plays a part in keeping women in their place, by convincing women that they like that which oppresses them. Moreover, it sells products and does so by convincing women that they need them, that life would be incomplete without them, that they will provide relief from all problems.

Women are told by the media that all they need to be happy and fulfilled, well liked and attractive is to buy sexier pantyhose, feminine hygiene spray (even though it causes infections and cancer), laundry detergent for brighter clothes and different junk food for their children.

Women are convinced, in alarming numbers, that there are safe miracle drugs to make them feel better and to help them cope (rather than change their lives). Women's dependence on drugs, both prescription and non-prescription, is directly related to the barrage of commercials designed to sell drugs as solutions to all problems. If you can't sleep, there are at least 30 sure cures; if you want to lose weight because you feel you're 'fat and ugly,' there are another couple of dozen drugs; if you're too tired from working full time at a job and raising two or three kids, there are several more to 'pick you up.'

As a result, though women have little money, they are the mainstay of our consumer society. Most ads are directed to women or to children who in turn pressure their mothers to buy things. Millions of dollars of profit are made through convincing women that material goods will improve their lives.

Conclusion

Women's oppression is reflected in women's lack of legitimate political power in our society. Women have little or no access to positions of power on any level in government, business, or other traditional institutions. As stated previously, few women have jobs which give them power or status; most are in very low level jobs. There are few women elected to political offices in this country, and the more powerful the position, the fewer women there are. Though women are 53% of the population there are but a handful of women throughout the Congress, Senate and Administration Cabinet. Women are tokenly represented on the Boards of Directors of the corporations which have so much power in this society. Women make up only a small percentage of the doctors, lawyers and other powerful professionals. Even in organizations where women workers are likely to be in the majority, as in social service agencies, men are most likely to be the directors. Women are generally visible only as tokens in positions of power: one woman Cabinet member, one woman judge, one woman on the nightly news.

Token women will not be able to significantly change the structure and ideas which hold women down. This is particularly true because those women who do "make it" in positions of power generally do not represent the majority of women: they are usually white, from wealthy backgrounds and have far more education and other privileges than most women. The lack of representation of women in established institutions of power will not change without fundamental changes in women's position in the society.

It was recognition of the need for fundamental changes in the society and the understanding that women didn't have the legitimate power to change society which created the women's movement. The first wave of the movement began in the 1800's and fought for women's suffrage, against battering, and for greater economic equality. The second wave began in the 1960's and has focused on the ERA (first drafted in 1924), reproductive rights, violence against women, economic inequality, lesbianism, and other issues. Both movements grew out of, and were integrally tied to, the struggle of Black people for justice: in the 1800's, the women's movement and the abolitionist movement worked together, and it was the civil rights movement of the 1960's which spawned the most recent women's movement. These connections indicate the need of the women's movement to work on *all* issues keeping women down, such as racism and classism, as well as the issues which focus on women's position as women in the society.

Sexism is widespread and deeply entrenched in our society; its symptoms include women's role in the family, women's economic inequality in the family and in the workforce, violence against women, the stereotyped and restrictive image of women in the media and women's lack of political power. In addition, many women face additional oppression because of their race, class or sexual preference. As a result, the women's movement continues to push for reforms which make women's lives more livable, such as battered women's programs and rape crisis centers, better jobs, etc., but also recognizes the need for an entire rethinking and restructuring of our society to make possible all women's right to self determination.

Gail Sullivan,
with Cindy Fascia

The Movement Against Woman Abuse

Her-Story

The battered women's movement grew out of the women's movement in the 1970's. Although women have for years provided refuge and support to other women in crisis, it was largely done on an individual basis. Feminism provided a view that "the personal is political" and that issues such as women's relationships with men, childrearing and violence in our lives are, in fact, social by nature. Through consciousness-raising groups and thousands of hours of discussions, women began to see the commonality of our experiences, and that much of what we experienced was due to political forces in our society. Feminists began to analyze the nuclear family as an institution of oppression because of women's lack of equality and our dependence on men. Women began organizing speakouts on rape and sexual assault and an analysis of rape as a means of dominating women was developed. As women began to talk about their own experiences of violence, they began to see the connection between the nuclear family and violence against women, and an understanding of battering, the "occupational hazard of housewives," emerged.

As feminists analyzed women's political problems, they also began to develop services to address them. Throughout the 1970's, women's centers and rape crisis centers were begun. Many of these service groups began to get pleas from battered women who had nowhere to turn, and the need for shelters and support services for battered women became obvious. The first shelter for battered women and their children was developed in England and the idea quickly spread throughout Europe and the United States. Feminists banded together in their communities to begin to provide emergency refuge (often in their own homes), to operate crisis lines, and to refer battered women to necessary services. They spoke and wrote about the issue in an effort to educate their communities about the severity of the problem. These groups, begun wholly on volunteer labor and without any funding, included women who had themselves experienced battering and women who had not; many groups included lesbians as well as heterosexual women; the women were of different races and class backgrounds.

The groups learned as they went along, since there were no real models for what they were trying to do: to create non-violent, women-controlled safe places for women in crisis and their children, where women of different backgrounds could live cooperatively and become independent of violent men. Many of the programs were collectives and operated non-hierarchically in order to provide alternatives to the kind of power relations which exist in traditional work places as well as in violent relationships. The basis of these groups was not only to provide escape but also to support women in becoming independent and powerful individuals who could, in turn, assist other women to escape and become independent. The groups recognized the need to build a movement that goes beyond services to work to eliminate violence against women by eliminating the male supremacy which perpetuates it.

National

The first groups for battered women began in the early 1970's, and by 1975 there were many women around the country working in or trying to start groups for battered women. *Working on Wife Abuse,* the first national directory that served as a referral and contact between shelters, service groups and individuals working on the issue of battering was published in 1976 by Betsy Warrior in Cambridge, MA. Women working against battering formed the beginnings of a national network of grass roots groups by squeezing in discussions between scheduled events at the International Women's Year Conference in Houston in 1977 and at the U.S. Civil Rights Commission hearing on domestic violence in Washington, D.C. Over the next couple of years an interim steering committee of the *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV)* worked on federal legislation providing funding to battered women services,* developed national visibility of the battered women's movement, and organized a national conference for grass roots service providers. In February 1980, 600 women attended an NCADV conference where they shared skills and information and gained a sense of nationwide movement.

At the same time that the NCADV began to form, some women developed a national newsletter on battering, the *National Communication Network.* It eventually merged with an anti-rape newsletter published by the Feminist Alliance Against Rape and together they became *AEGIS: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women.*

Massachusetts

In 1975, some women in the Greater Boston area formed *Respond* and began speaking out about battering, hoping to open a shelter. In January, 1976, two former battered women opened up their Cambridge apartment and publicized it as a shelter, *Transition House,* the first in New England. They were overwhelmed by the number of battered women and their children in need of escape. In August, 5000 women marched in Boston in a "*WOMEN SUPPORT WOMEN*" march, against battering and in support of women's shelters. The march helped Transition House raise funds and move into a separate house, and resulted in many women becoming involved in work against battering. It

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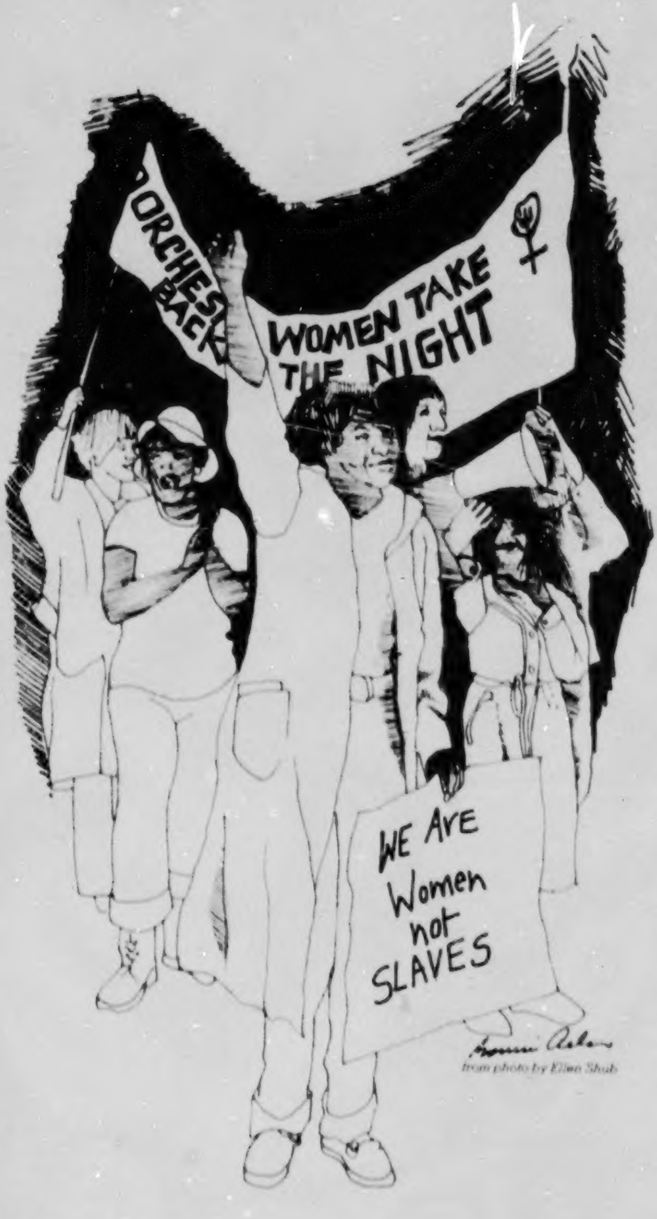
****this legislation has since been denied because of right wing pressure on Congress.***



from photo by Ellen Shub

raised public consciousness of women's role as houseworkers and of woman abuse and added to the growing momentum of the battered women's movement. At the same time, women in the Greenfield area formed *NELCWIT* and began the first rural battered women's group in Massachusetts. By 1977, *Casa Myrna Vazquez* opened its doors; it was the first shelter in Mass. begun by, and focused on the needs of, Black and Hispanic women. A group of women formed the *Battered Women Action Committee* to draft and lobby for the Abuse Prevention Act, passed in July, 1978, providing protective orders for battered women and outlining police responsibility in cases of domestic violence.

In 1978, several more groups had formed around the state and were at various stages of development. The groups came together in a statewide meeting of 60 women and formed the *Massachusetts Coalition of **Battered Women Service Groups,*** **then 11 members.** The Coalition was formed in recognition of the need to share information and skills, to know more about each other's programs, to strengthen and support each other locally and statewide and to work jointly on mutually necessary projects. They recognized that the long term survival of individual groups and our long range goal of ending woman abuse is directly tied to the existence of a strong state and national coalition. Additionally, the Mass. legislature was about to pass a law providing the first state funding for battered women services and the grassroots feminist groups saw a coalition as a mechanism to avoid competing with each other and to strengthen their collective position to receive the funding.

The Mass. Coalition now has 18 (or more) member groups working together. Since its inception, the Coalition has consolidated a strong network among its members; has provided skills-sharing, training and written materials for members of battered women's groups, particularly in the areas of legal adovcacy, community education and counseling; has assisted more than a half dozen new groups to develop; has cooperatively sought and negotiated for state funds; has worked on conferences and public education; and has participated in three *"Take Back the Night"* demonstrations as a coalition.

Why A Coalition

Coalition building is an important step in moving beyond simply providing battered women and their children with shelter, toward finding a way to eliminate male violence against women. By coalescing, we can reach across the lines which divide us: race, class, culture, age and sexual preference. Our work is not simply to provide service, though that is in itself an enormous task; we need to change attitudes, raise consciousness and take action (whether through demonstrations, direct action, lobbying, etc.). We need to gain immediate reforms while also working for long range changes. We need to build coalitions with other groups, such as anti-rape groups, anti-racist groups and those working for reproductive rights, economic justice, childcare needs, etc. By coming together to share our strength, by working together to make our voices heard, and by sharing with each other what we know, we strengthen our movement.

—*Gail Sullivan*

The Mass. Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups

Every woman who staffs in a member group is welcome to become a member of the Coalition. Membership requires agreement with the purpose, principles and goals of the coalition* and five hours a month of work in any of the following work committees of the Coalition:

Committees

Fundraising Committee (one representative per member group) shares skills and information on funds and fiscal management; coordinates fundraising efforts of groups, especially dealing with DSS funding.

Inservice Training Committee prepares training materials (including this manual) and coordinates inservice training of member groups around the issue of empowerment of all women, and other subjects as they arise.

Legislative Committee educates legislators and service groups about federal and state legislation affecting battered women and battered women service groups.

EEO/Anti-Racism Committee works on Affirmative Action plan for Coalition and member groups and an anti-racist strategy for the Coalition; reviews Coalition policies and materials for cultural bias; coordinates discussions about racism and related issues.

Community Education Committee develops statewide and regional community education strategies and materials; develops media resources; responds to media and public education requests.

Membership/Ethics Committee oversees membership applications and requirements; develops membership policies; monitors issues between groups and issues about any group's or individual's status.

Legal Committee develops legal resources to work with battered women's groups.

Fiscal Committee oversees fiscal management of Coalition; reviews budget and financial statements.

Personnel Committee oversees hiring, supervision and grievances with regard to Coalition paid staff.

New work committees develop as the Coalition begins new projects or enough interest is expressed.

The Executive Committee, which includes regional representatives and other individuals, is responsible for overseeing the paid staff, committees, fundraising and ongoing work of the Coalition.

The **Steering Committee**, consisting of one representative per group, meets quarterly and makes long range policy decisions for the Coalition, and shares information and skills between groups.

In addition, there are general membership meetings, usually for skills sharing and training purposes, about four times per year, open to all members. There are also four regional caucuses (North Shore, Greater Boston-South Shore, Central Mass. and Western Mass.) which meet to share information and do work specific to their area, and to support each other in working on strengthening each of the organizations in the Coalition.

General Purpose:

To work towards the creation of a society in which woman abuse, as part of the larger problem of violence against women, will no longer exist; and to help individual women and their children rebuild their lives.

Principles of Unity:

★ We agree on the stated purpose, goals and objectives of the Coalition.

★ We are a coalition of individuals and not-for-profit women's organizations and program components including shelters, crisis lines and task forces which are community based and organized and run exclusively for women in crisis and their children, and where applicable, other family members.

★ We are committed to helping women acquire the information and survival skills necessary to take control over their lives and the decisions affecting their lives, we will not encourage women to remain in, or return to, violent situations.

★ We are committed to a model of self help: we encourage self-determination and self sufficiency for all women; we do not see welfare, the courts, etc. as a solution for battered women, yet recognize our need to use them in our work. We wish to help women understand the system in order to change it to be more responsive to their needs and/or to work outside of it.

★ We are committed to working towards a violence-free society and to combatting the racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism and ageism inherent in the system under which we presently live.

★ As part of this work, we are also committed to confronting and changing ourselves as individuals, as service groups, and as a coalition with regard to the above named issues; and we are committed to working cooperatively and to listening and respecting each other, recognizing our differences in race, class and sexual preference.

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decided at September 18, 1980 general membership retreat

★ To maintain membership in the coalition, members will be expected to participate in the ongoing work of the coalition, as required by the membership guidelines, and will be accountable to the entire coalition for work done on its behalf.

★ We are committed to building trust and supportive relations within the coalition and to avoiding competition among member groups. We are also committed to making power and leadership in the organization accessible to all participating women.

Priority Goals

1. **To internally strengthen member groups:**
   - evaluate groups' structures, process and policies;
   - monitor groups' structure and development after evaluation;
   - develop regional support groups to provide skills sharing to each other on organizational development.
2. **To support, encourage and recognize the leadership of Third World women in the community, in our shelter/service groups and in the Coalition:**
   - redefine our concept of outreach;
   - establish and maintain connections with community organizations in which Third World women are involved;
   - evaluate affirmative action of member groups and improve it.
3. **To strengthen each group's sense of itself as an organizer of a political movement:**
   - each group will sponsor discussions on the relationship of their work to this movement as an ongoing part of inservice training;
   - members of the coalition staff will be invited to at least one of these discussions in each group;
   - each group will hold a discussion on what it means to belong to the Coalition.
4. **To insure that our work is equally empowering to all women (within a year):**
   - staff should assist women in shelters to take more responsibility by: encouraging women not to be dependent on staffers, encouraging women to share their knowledge with each other as peer advocates;
   - staff should look at the work they need to do other than services, allowing women in shelters or support groups to do advocacy and services with each other;
   - groups should develop list of staff behaviors that are empowering of women, and those which aren't, and educate themselves about these;
   - Inservice Training Committee should develop an agenda for discussion about issues of empowerment, with input from member groups;
   - Groups will use the above agenda to hold discussions among staff about empowerment.
5. **To keep woman abuse in the public eye:**
   - visual campaigns such as transit posters, bumper stickers, etc.
   - End Woman Abuse Week
   - statewide public service announcements
   - statistics publication

Bonnie acker

from photo in *Foxfire 2*

Chapter 2:

Working With Women Who Are Battered

How We Support Battered Women

Commonalities

Have you ever felt afraid of a man?

Have you ever felt or been abused in a relationship?

Have you ever been told that you're not good enough—too fat, too thin, stupid, inadequate or a bad mother?

Have you ever felt that you didn't deserve to be treated with dignity and respect?

Have you ever felt isolated and alone?

Have you ever felt that you're the only one experiencing what you're experiencing?

Have you ever lost friends because of a relationship you were in?

Have you ever felt as though you couldn't make it on your own?

Have you ever stayed in a relationship for economic reasons, for fear you'd be unwanted elsewhere, or out of love, knowing the relationship was bad for you?

Have you ever felt hostility towards you while trying to improve or change your life just because of your color and/or class background?

These are common experiences of battered women, but all women have felt or experienced some, if not all, of the above. Former battered women bring invaluable sensitivity to their work with other battered women, because their lives and feelings have most closely paralleled those of other women experiencing violence. Moreover, a woman who has been battered and has escaped lets another woman know that it is possible for her to escape as well. However, whether or not you are a former battered woman, you bring to your project the value of being a woman and the understanding and compassion for another woman's feelings of fear and isolation. Your opinion and support are valuable to other women.

And Differences

Just as each of us has some experiences common to all women as well as experiences which differ, based on our particular lives and situations, battered women coming to our project have some common and some different experiences. In order to be able to support *all* women coming to us, we need to understand different experiences and the effect they have on women's views of themselves, their sense of options available to them, and the way they relate to one another.

Women's experiences differ based on their class background and their race and/or culture. A Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking woman will face language/cultural barriers almost everywhere she goes outside her community, as well as additional cultural disapproval for leaving her husband. A Black woman will have had less access to jobs and/or housing because of the hatred and stereotyping of Black people by white people. A woman who has worked solely as a housewife/mother may have to redefine her self-image to think of working outside the home. A woman who has been a prostitute may be in even more danger than another battered woman because she is her pimp's "meal ticket" and if she leaves, he suffers economic loss. She also may have a hard time fitting in if all the other women were in nuclear family situations. A lesbian woman who has been abused by her husband will have quite a different experience than other women, as will a lesbian who has been abused by a woman lover.

Women of all ages are battered. A teenager battered by her father and/or her boyfriend will face many extra legal difficulties if she is a minor, and her lifestyle will perhaps be different from that of a middle-aged woman. An elderly women of 65 or 70 who's been battered may have an even more difficult time thinking of leaving if she's been with the man for 50 years (whether the abuse occurred throughout the marriage or began recently). She also faces particular discrimination if she tries to work in the labor force. A woman who is blind, deaf, in a wheelchair, or otherwise physically different will face greater restrictions than other women on her ability to leave a violent situation; she will also face restrictions on her options, such as living spaces, work locations, etc., once she has left.

In doing our work, we need to be able to respond to the differences of women's experiences, and to assist them in figuring out how to meet the particular needs they have. We need to look at and perhaps change our own feelings and attitudes about women different from ourselves. A part of our work in sheltering and/or supporting battered women needs to be challenging the attitudes which divide women so that we can come together in mutual support of each other.

Supporting Women: Our Philosophy

Most battered women, in order to leave violence, primarily need safety and support. They feel isolated and dependent and blame themselves. They need recognition that their experience is shared and that their problem is social and political, not individual. Our greatest strength lies in providing these things through a safe place to stay and the support and understanding of other women. Many battered women shelters do not take in women who are in serious emotional crisis because the issues are more complicated and take more time and energy than we can provide, because of our focus on battered women and their children.

Peer Support:

There's a lot of mystique and intimidation about counseling and therapy which often make us feel that the support we give someone isn't as good or as important as "real counseling." "I don't have the education to counsel someone. I don't have the training; I'm not a professional." In fact, most women have learned many of the skills necessary to be supportive listeners by being mothers, sisters and friends to others. We have empathy, caring for others and the ability to listen to and encourage another woman.

Women who staff and women who use our programs may have different experiences, but each have much to give and much to learn from each other. A staffer's perspective is long-range; her concern and knowledge revolve around the group's well-being. A woman using our services, on the other hand, has a lot of knowledge about the experience of battering and of the services because of her personal involvement. While staffers necessarily have more overall power than women using the services, this doesn't negate the basic equality between them. As more former battered women return to staff, the division between women using the services and staff will lessen.

Service group staff are not professionals; most battered women do not need professional help. Moreover, people who have gone through traditional schooling have historically been part of the problem of battering. Many psychologists and psychiatrists tend to believe and reinforce many myths about women, such as the Freudian theory that women are masochistic. They are taught to objectify their "clients," and to see problems as individual emotional symptoms rather than social or political issues. They separate themselves from the experience as though they could never be involved in such a crisis. Many women have experienced going to a male therapist and leaving his office feeling emotionally abused or blamed, rather than helped. Because of this it is difficult for many therapists to be truly helpful to women suffering from battering. Not all professionals, however, adhere to traditional approaches; there are good, unbiased therapists around, and there *is* a role for formalized therapy and counseling for battered women who choose it.

from photo in *Foxfire 2*

Women Supporting Women:

Battered women need women's support: battering and all forms of violence against women are part of our oppression. We all have faced similar problems, especially if we, too, have been battered. We are in a position to understand and empathize with other women's experiences; we understand more easily than men the terrible effects of battering. Women who have been isolated and dependent on men need to know that there are other women who've had the same experiences. Women supporting women is what we've always done—with our mothers, daughters, sisters and friends. On a broader level, women supporting each other develops the women's movement.

Self Help:

We need to assist battered women to become strong and independent. This means that women should not replace control by an abusive man with control by an abusive welfare system or by well-meaning staff. Most women, with proper support and with the necessary resources offered them, have the ability to take control over their lives. Staffers should be in a secondary role as advocates, encouraging battered women to take care of their own business, make their own phone calls and take responsibility for their own appointments. We should provide them with the information they need about resources and we should help them strategize what to do—then they can do it. By being their own advocates and representing their own interests to bureaucracies, with support from staff. women learn that they don't have to rely on others to do things for them, that they have power and are capable of taking control. Only when a woman reaches a major obstacle should a staffer step in to do things for her, and then only at her request. Although women using our services may expect us to do things for them and to have all the answers, and although it can be ego-gratifying for us to meet those expectations, we ultimately do them a disservice if we take over work they can do themselves.

We should arm women with skills to survive, such as:

- knowledge of how to deal with bureaucracies
- political perspective: an understanding of women's oppression and the ability to analyze their situations and figure out how to move
- a sense of personal power and confidence

Empowerment:

A self-help model leads to empowerment. As a result of our oppression, we have been made to feel powerless: that we can't control our own lives, don't have control over our bodies and can't change things that hurt us. Battered women, in particular, have been told that they are worthless, stupid, incapable, and responsible for the pain they feel. Therefore, our program must contradict these lies and help women gain a sense of personal power and capabilities. By empowerment we mean women beginning to direct their own lives, to control their own bodies, to decide what they want and to try to get it. This also means taking responsibility for their own actions while recognizing that they are not to blame for the violence done to them.

In practical terms, empowerment within a shelter is residents having control over the children's care, the meals, cleaning and general operation of the house, as well as having input into anything which affects them such as site visits and new house policies. It means gaining knowledge from each other and from staff, and then being able to share that with other women.

There are obviously limits to any one woman's power, especially in our society: she may well not have the power (financial) to get an interesting, well-paying job, or the power to stop her violent man from being violent, and she won't have total power over the service group either. She can't have control over institutions around her and doesn't have power *over* other people. However, in gaining knowledge and confidence in herself, she can go a long way toward developing her personal power and her ability to get what she needs from those around her.

Language:

We need to look at our language to see what philosophy and attitudes it represents. Words like "client" connote unequal relations: the professional has knowledge, answers and power, and the client seeks help and feels powerless. "Counseling" often connotes such a power difference as well, because the roles are seen as static: the counselor always in the helper position, the client needing help.

Other seemingly harmless words can also have a negative impact. For example, calling a shelter, crisis line or support group an "agency" may, in a battered woman's mind, equate the group with the welfare department and other bureaucratic agencies. Similarly, constantly referring to a battered woman as "the victim" suggests that that is *all* she is; she will always be without any control or decision making power over her life. The knowledge that she has been a victim of the batterer and the society which allows battering can help to free a woman from the guilt and shame of violence; but if we identify a woman as "victim" we only box her in and lock her into a passive role. She can and should move away from that role by taking control in her own time.

When feminists first brought battering to the public awareness, it was called woman abuse or wifebeating, noting *who* was getting battered. Now, many funding agencies, social services, even feminist groups, refer to the problem as domestic violence or spouse abuse. This language change reflects an attempt to mask the real issue—the battering of women, an act committed by individual men, as a part of women's systematic oppression. We need to be careful not to fall into using such terminology: we have a responsibility to make our language reflect the reality of women's experience and direct attention to the real problems.

We all need to look at how language affects us and the women for whom we provide services. Our language should acknowledge women's growth and power. Staffing in a shelter, crisis line or support group is a constant learning experience, and we have to share our ideas and experiences with other staffers and residents. Information and learning have their own special kind of power; by sharing these with each other, we help to empower all women.

What Staffers Should Do:

- Help women think about their situations, to realize they're not alone, that other women have had similar experiences.
- Help women figure out what they want (a novel question for most women because we've never been taught to think in those terms).
- Identity feelings (such as fear, helplessness, powerlessness, hopelessness) which may be preventing women from making decisions.
- Be honest, be for real: our lives are not perfect either; offer your own experiences if relevant. We can't say what to do, but we can offer ideas from our own lives and from what options we see open for women.
- Give women the help they need to do things for themselves—even if it means saying no to requests sometimes; that can be the best thing to do.
- Offer resources: who, what, when, where.
- Help women gain a sense of self-confidence and the ability to take care of themselves.
- Be challenging, even if you're afraid of not being "nice" or not being liked. Being supportive does *not* mean allowing women to take advantage of us or our organizations.
- Be open to women's choices: each woman has control over her life and needs to make her own decisions; we can't be too invested in what decision she makes.
- Hear what women have to say; don't assume that you know the answers or even the questions.
- While realizing and building on the commonality of women's experiences, recognize the differences and diversity of women as well. Equality is not sameness; women of different races and cultures experience many things differently.
- Set limits for yourself in order not to burn out.

Answering the Hotline:

As a staffer, you may be nervous when you first answer the hotline. It is okay to make mistakes. Be sure to ask for help or support from other staffers if you need it. Remember that your role is to offer support, safety, information and an opportunity to share feelings with someone who understands. You may be the first person to whom a woman has spoken about her situation.

Much has been written which gives labels to skills that most of us already possess. Here are a few basic suggestions which might help you best utilize your natural skills when answering the hotline.*

- Make sure the woman on the other end of the phone knows that you are there, that you are listening. Sometimes, a woman will be too upset to absorb a lot of practical information, but she will be able to absorb your caring.
- Be yourself. You have feelings about what the caller is saying and it is okay to express them in your personal style.
- Remember that although a woman may not be able to make certain decisions now, the information and support you give now may be a catalyst for change at a later date.
- Make sure she knows that it's fine to call back any time.
- Talk about difficult calls with other staffers to share ideas about how to handle them.

—Gail Sullivan and Jane Weiss

from photo by Ellen Shub

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refer to "Dealing With Women in Crisis" in Chapter 6 for additional suggestions.

Anxiety And Depression

What Creates Anxiety and Depression:

Anxiety and depression are endemic among women and are often a result of women's position in this society and the oppression women face. Because women's role is generally that of caretaker, women are held responsible for everything from the ring around their husbands' collars to their husbands' alcoholism and their children's failures. Add to this the fact that women have been severely restricted from shaping the society in which we live, by virtue of having no input in making the laws and arranging the economic order, and you come up with a parodox guaranteed to create anxiety and/or depression. Women have no power to control their environment, yet are taught to feel totally responsible for everything that happens within in.

Women are socialized to see marriage and the family as their primary goals in life and are expected to be fulfilled and happy as housewives and mothers. However, many women feel trapped, bored and exhausted in their day to day work, but can't express these dissatisfactions because they think they are at fault, that they aren't good enough mothers/wives. Women often internalize the dissatisfaction they feel, resulting in anxiety, exhaustion, depression and a variety of other symptoms.

Further, when women are victimized by rape, battering or incest, they are told that they, not their attackers, are guilty, that they provoked their own assault. Their guilt and the accompanying shame, anger and powerlessness can often result in women feeling anxious or depressed. Since women's anger at being attacked can't be expressed, because it might result in further abuse (especially in battering cases), the anger is turned inward, against themselves.

While a woman is more likely to direct her anger and frustration against herself, a man is more likely to take out his anger against his wife or children in violent behavior. The different ways that each deals with frustration indicate their relative perceptions of the amount of control they believe they have over their lives. The woman, especially one who is battered, sees herself as powerless, while the man, especially one who batters, sees himself as powerful, i.e., able to control his environment as he chooses. The anger and aggressive behavior are excused in men, seen as resulting from their problems at work, etc., and are even considered appropriate, while passive acceptance is expected of women.

The solution offered by doctors to the millions of women experiencing tension, exhaustion, fear and depression is that of mood-altering drugs. Many women take stimulants to wake up in the morning and tranquilizers to calm them down later in the day. 72% of the regular users of all *anti*-depressants are women, and 70% of the habitual users of "minor" depressants (tranquilizers) are women.* The fact that a doctor prescribes drugs in response to a woman's depression reinforces her sense of guilt and self-hatred; she is even more convinced, wrongly, that *she* is the problem, not the abuse, entrapment, or exhaustion she suffers.

Dealing With Anxiety and Depression in Battered Women's Programs:

Most of the women coming to battered women's programs will be suffering some degree of depression and/or anxiety. It would be impossible not to after experiencing a battering relationship. This can sometimes have a profound effect on women's energy levels and their ability to interact with others, especially in a shelter. A woman who appears lazy may well be suffering from depression which makes everything seem too much of an effort to handle. Other women at the shelter should try to find out the reasons for her inactivity before assuming that she's deliberately shirking her responsibilities. Although there are some women who don't share the responsibility of housework in a shelter because they dislike it, there are other women whose resources are so depleted that it takes a great effort to cope with even the simplest tasks. A woman who wants to sleep a great deal may well be suffering from depression also. A staffer can help the woman by not putting too much pressure on her or by not making her feel guilty about her lack of energy. Encourage her to take on small tasks that she'll have the energy to accomplish, so that she can eventually increase her endurance and motivation. Women should be given plenty of time and attention to talk about how they feel about their experiences. In talking with other women and finding their shared experiences, women can begin to lift the weight of hopelessness and despair and begin to feel more able to make changes in their lives.

Many women who are battered, even women in their teens, have physical symptoms associated with years of chronic stress, such as high blood pressure, ulcers and heart disease. Tension, fear and anxiety have been a day to day part of their lives. Some have developed chronic anxiety patterns, such as phobias. These fears can keep them from doing some things necessary for their survival and are certainly obstacles to their autonomy.

One phobia, agoraphobia, almost solely affects women. It is one of the most severe forms of anxiety reaction, usually recognized as fear of open spaces or crowds. Agoraphobia is characterized by sudden, often unexplainable, attacks of extreme terror. It can be triggered by any seemingly innocuous stress or something like lighting, temperature, fatigue or by nothing apparent. A person with agoraphobia sometimes restricts her activities and mobility more and more in an effort to avoid the attacks. However, there is no consistent rule as to where the attacks are likely to occur. For some they might occur only in subways or elevators; for others they might occur in movies, restaurants, closed spaces, open spaces, crowds, when alone, when writing, when walking or in any combination of these activities or places.

One young woman traveled quite a distance to come to a shelter in spite of the fact that she had an intense anxiety reaction to most forms of public transportation. She walked part of the way with her children and possessions, then took a cab (which she could ill afford) the rest of the way. Unlike many people whose anxiety reaction develops from cumulative or intermittent stress, this young woman could pinpoint the origin of her phobia. When she was a young girl, she had been in a subway alone, waiting for a train, when a man approached her, exposed himself and made threatening remarks. She ran to leave but couldn't find her way out. She finally bumped into a subway worker whom she asked for help. Instead of helping her, he verbally abused her, told her to get lost and disappeared. The subway phobia didn't manifest itself until later, after she had gotten married. As her marriage provoked more anxiety in her, her subway phobia started, gradually increasing to include other forms of public transportation. This woman needed staffers to help her find alternate means of transportation to take care of her business, although with support and accompaniment she was able to travel short distances on public transportation.

Another woman was terrified of the dark because her husband always beat her at night. She gradually began to feel that nightfall meant that something bad was going to happen. Then darkness, inside or out, would trigger reactions of terror in her. This terror made her stay with her husband for a long time, even though he caused her anxiety and she wanted to leave. Because of her phobia, she was very interested in arranging to live with another woman after she left the shelter.

Staffers should be sensitive to the dynamics in a battering relationship which inevitably lead to some amount of anxiety and depression. If a staffer has an understanding of the ways that guilt and fear are used to manipulate and control women in general, she will also be sensitive in dealing with battered women who are anxious, tense or depressed. Staffers should also try to be aware of the way that women's anxiety and depression surface. We need to not make women feel guilty or ashamed of the stress which their abuse has created. We also need to be able to support women emotionally to overcome the obstacles in their way and to support women concretely by helping them figure out how to do what they need to and to set up situations where their anxiety will begin to lessen. Because women's anxiety reactions, especially phobias, may well last after the battering relationship, we need to help women figure out what support and assistance they will need after they leave our programs in order to best get on with their lives.

— *Gail Sullivan,*
based on ideas from
Betsy Warrior and Paula Tobin

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*Gena Corea, *The Hidden Malpractice,* Jove 1979.

Supporting Third World Women

For the past few years I've been involved with a shelter, Casa Myrna Vazquez, which serves primarily (but not exclusively) Hispanic and Black women and their children. This group of women faces many barriers and obstacles because of their cultural upbringing/conditioning. Also, their race and economic status often means poor housing, health and general living conditions for them and their families. Shelter workers and volunteers need more awareness and sensitivity to these issues to "help these women help themselves." I would like to explore a number of these issues and the challenge they present to those in the role of counselors, supporters, and advocates.

Coming to a shelter is a radical step for most women. For Hispanic women it may mean even greater change in a period of tremendous upheaval and transition. They are dealing not only with the emotional trauma of leaving their husbands, but also with the stress of adjusting to a new environment, especially if they have recently moved from Puerto Rico or another Latin American country to the U.S. For many it is the first time they have stepped outside the closed and isolated circle of their homes. Simultaneously they may have to adjust to an urban U.S. setting and a totally different lifestyle, with differing expectations for women.

Second, facing the decision to leave usually presents more intense personal conflict for a Hispanic woman due to the very strong cultural tradition of "a woman's place is in the home." Having resisted the pressures of church and relatives to keep the family together at all costs, in making a decision to leave she often feels tremendous guilt and betrayal toward her children.

Third, the personal resources in education, skills, and confidence to make decisions and take action are limited for many Third World and low-income women. Since many started having children as teenagers and/or married young, they often have little formal education, contributing to their sense of low self-esteem, and financial and emotional dependency. Hispanic women, particularly, have had little familiarity in dealing with social service and housing agencies outside their homes or the family circle, having relied on husbands/boyfriends to make decisions and relate to such agencies. Additionally, many women are confined by their inability to speak English. Learning English is difficult since it involves a process of acculturation which many resist because it can be a threat to their cultural support systems. Handicapped by language and poor self-image, they are fearful of tackling bureaucracies whose assistance they may need to survive.

Fourth, the economic realities of life in the U.S. have far-reaching effects on Hispanic and Black family relationships; on power relationships within the family and the woman's sense of self-worth. When the husband can't find a job or becomes unemployed, the shift of husband as breadwinner to wife as holder of the purse-strings via welfare can start or escalate family violence. A woman often overlooks or excuses her husband's beatings out of feelings of guilt for a situation not of her own making and because she still cares for the man.

It is crucial for staff to understand the interplay of cultural imperatives and racial/economic pressures in Third World women's feelings, sense of personal value and service needs in order to build supportive relationships. These women need encouragement without pity, direction and guidance in identifying options, and advocacy without substitution of another kind of dependency.

At Casa Myrna the racial/ethnic composition of the house often changes overnight, and with these changes comes a new set of problems and possibilities. At one moment the house might have a few or one English-speaking woman, then shift to an equal balance of the three ethnic groups. Whether the women remain isolated, segregate themselves, or freely intermingle depends on several factors: a) how many women are bilingual; b) women's prior exposure and experience with other ethnic groups; c) how strongly racial/ethnic prejudices and feelings are held and acted on. Food preferences, child-rearing practices and housekeeping habits are three areas which serve as focal points for the women to vent their unconscious or conscious racial feelings and attitudes. The shelter can become a "tempest in the teapot" simmering with racial/ethnic tensions and hatred, camouflaging the fear, tensions and sufferings common to all the women.

We feel that the interpersonal dynamics of sharing a multiracial/multicultural living space offers shelter workers and volunteers a unique opportunity to address the racist attitudes and beliefs of everyone's upbringing. In any and all cases, staff can help maintain harmonious relationships by openly dealing with these feelings, whether it be in impromptu coffee klatches, house meetings or support groups. The important thing is to directly and immediately face issues of race and class. Before this can happen, shelter staff should create a forum where they can explore their own racial feelings and prejudices. This is not an overnight process. At Casa Myrna we are just beginning to learn how to help each other grow as individuals and as a group.

—Curdina Hill

Supporting Lesbians Who Are Battered

Lesbians who have been abused may need our shelters and support services. Some lesbians are being abused by ex-husbands or boyfriends, some are still living with abusive men while involved in lesbian relationships, and others are being battered by their women lovers. We need to be prepared to offer effective and supportive services to lesbians, acknowledging the similarities and differences that exist between lesbian and non-lesbian women and their situations.

In working on a hotline, we need to keep in our minds that the woman calling might be a lesbian. Some lesbians are not "out" about who they are; a lesbian might say that she is with a man (even when she is not) in order to feel safe enough to make the call. All hotline workers should be prepared to sensitively handle a call from a lesbian, while knowing that she could prefer to talk to a lesbian volunteer or staff person.

In doing advocacy, a staffer should be aware that the society does not acknowledge lesbian relationships and that the attitudes a lesbian faces and the subsequent services she receives could be very different than those for heterosexual women.

Lesbians who batter other lesbians are not men, though the violence in some instances can be of the same intensity. We need to be careful not to equate all violence, taking the focus away from the system of male dominance which condones and perpetrates violence against women. Although violence in any form is inexcusable, some lesbians have had no other model for dealing with conflicts than what they have learned from male-female relations in this society. However, women on either side of the battering relationship do not have the social, political, economic or personal power of men. A lesbian brought into a courtroom for battery will face much different treatment than a male batterer would. She will be judged for the "crime" of being a lesbian as well as for the acts that she committed.

A lesbian coming to the shelter needs to know that it is OK for her to be there and that there will be support for her. If she is coming from a battering situation with a man, she needs to be able to talk about all aspects of her feelings about her relationships with her batterer, her lover and her children (if she has any). Staffers and other residents should be careful not to jump to the conclusion that a woman has become a lesbian as a result of having been battered by a man. If possible, we should be prepared to refer the woman to other lesbian resources in the community if she doesn't want to stay in a shalter with all non-lesbian women, or if the shelter is not a supportive place for her. We need to make sure that she is not left alone to deal with homophobia in the shelter, whether or not it is directed at her.

Most women have the potential to be allies and to be supportive of each other in all kinds of situations. As part of our work of empowering all women, we need to be aware of and actively combat all of the ways that women have been divided from each other. Homophobia is one of these ways. By providing good, conscious services to a lesbian, we are not only helping this one woman, we are continuing to build strength and alliances between all women.

—M. Smith

Chapter 3:

Mothers, Children And Child Abuse

Mothers And Children

Women often come to work in the battered women's movement thinking only about working with women, and assuming that children can be taken care of by child care workers. That kind of isolation of children doesn't make sense because the children are also in crisis. They are a continuing and important part of a woman's life after she leaves our program and mothers and children will continue to deal with the effects that violence has had on their lives. Moreover, children are two-thirds of a shelter population at any given time.

Support for Single Mothers

Women usually get a lot of support from us for leaving violent situations, dealing with the legal and welfare systems, and being on their own, but get very little concrete support for being single parents. We must give this support because the issues involved in being a single parent are important for all mothers whether they work outside the home or not. In order for us to be able to give that support we need to look at our attitudes about mothers and their roles, as well as what mothers themselves think they can or are supposed to do. Some common assumptions about mothers are:

- A mother authomatically knows *everything* about how and what to do for her baby from the minute it is born.
- A mother stops needing anything for herself and gets all her fulfillment from doing things for her children.
- A mother never stops feeling love for her children, not even for a minute.
- A mother has no right to be angry at her kids.
- A mother is at fault if any problem comes up in her child's life (at school, with friends, etc.) and it is her total responsibility to make it better.
- A mother must always put her children's physical and emotional needs before her own.
- A mother who contemplates temporarily or permanently leaving her children to meet her own needs is a bad mother.
- A mother who doesn't work outside the home doesn't work.
- A mother who fails to live up to these standards all the time is a bad mother.

These societal expectations are based on white middle class notions about what mothers are supposed to be; therefore, all mothers are affected by them. For example, in some cultures it may be more permissible for a mother to be angry at her kids, but a white social worker may judge her negatively for it and place demands on her according to this judgment.

Even some mothers who know how ridiculous these assumptions are feel under constant pressure to live up to them, and feel guilty when they can't. It's up to us to challenge these assumptions in order to support mothers. We should also help them figure out what support they need and where they can find it when they leave us.

In this society mothers are given total responsibility for their children, and their work is undervalued. As feminists we feel child-rearing should be viewed as serious work and the responsibility shared on all levels: by workplaces providing good day care programs, by fathers in a nuclear family situation, by other friends and family members, etc. Although women are only in our programs for a short time and have primary responsibility for their children while they are, it's an important statement for them to hear that we think mothers should not always be alone in having ultimate responsibility for their kids. We show this by providing childcare to the extent we can, and by staff members assuming some responsibility for what's happening with the children. It's particularly beneficial to have male childcare workers because it's good for women and their children, especially boys, to see that men can take care of kids and be gentle with them.

Children are in Crisis

Besides our responsibility to support mothers, it is important to recognize children as individuals with different personalities and needs. They are a large part of the population we deal with and are as affected by the crisis as their mothers. Some kids have been beaten; all of them have been traumatized by the violence in their homes. They feel even more powerless than their mothers, because it is the mothers who have decided to leave, bringing the children with them. Because their mothers are in crisis, the children often don't have any idea of where they're going or why. Imagine being six years old, bundled up and taken to a whole new place with lots of people you don't know and very little explanation of why your life is topsy-turvy.

It is important to support children as well as mothers through the crisis. These children are one of the keys to change that will eventually end violence. Kids grow up quickly and learn behavior they see. We don't want to be a "band-aid" social service provider, only dealing with the immediate crisis without offering alternatives to traditional role models and changing the lessons children learn about power dynamics in relationships between men and women. In working with children we are dealing with long as well as short term solutions.

Situations That Come Up

As a movement we oppose the use of violence as a means of controlling others, women or children. We support equality in all relationships and the concept of helping people to assume power over their own lives. Part of that means helping mothers and kids find ways to work through problems that are non-violent, physically and emotionally. We understand how difficult this can be, but we believe that it is crucial that we find more positive and nurturing ways to help our children develop into supportive and supporting people.

We need to interrupt women when we see them hitting their children or hear them screaming at them. It would be a lot easier to pretend we didn't see or hear anything and leave the room rather than intervening. But scary as it is to step into situations like that, the alternative of ignoring it is more dangerous in the long run. However, interrupting by itself isn't enough. We have to figure out how to participate and offer possible alternatives that work. Although none of us has all the answers, we need to be willing to risk trying in spite of our fears or feelings of inadequacy.

Imagine that you are a staffer sitting in the kitchen of a shelter where a woman is trying to cook dinner while her four-year-old boy pulls on her leg, demands attention and spills the canned tomatoes all over the floor. The woman finally turns around, and screams, "Get the fuck out of this kitchen before I break your arm." What do you do now? It is difficult to confront this threat because we're taught not to interfere with a mother and her child, and because motherhood is such a large part of a woman's identity, we fear how threatening our criticism may be. If you're a white staffer and the woman living in the shelter is a Third World woman, it could be even more difficult for her to trust you because of her experience with white people in positions of authority. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the inherent power dynamics.

Let the woman know that you understand her frustration, and if you're a mother, that you too feel furious with your kids at times. It's okay for us as mothers to feel angry. However, we need to talk with her about how her kids feel when she reacts this way and ask how she felt when she was being threatened with physical harm. You might also talk with her about how she feels when you become involved in the interaction between her and her child. By initiating this discussion, you may provide the space for a woman to think creatively about relating to her child. The ideas might work somewhat at the time, and a mother will remember and be able to use them again. One of the nicest things about trying is that it develops empathy between a staffer and a mother. Helping her respond to her child in more positive and nurturing ways (while still having the space to express anger and frustration) is extremely rewarding for both of you and brings you closer together.

You might sit down with both the mother and child and ask the child how he felt when his mother screamed at him. Having you there can create a safe environment for the child. The woman will have the opportunity to hear what it's like for the kids to live in the shelter, i.e., it's crowded, it's difficult to spend so much time inside, etc.

The most hectic times in the shelter are usually dinnertime and bedtime. You can offer to help in the kitchen and with the children. There are constructive and non-constructive ways to offer help. You shouldn't act as if you have all the answers and she doesn't have any. It's important not to be condescending. Instead, try to think about ways people could offer you help in difficult times that would make it easier for you to accept.

Child-rearing, though it falls primarily if not exclusively on women in our society, is in many ways influenced directly and indirectly by men. Using power over a child to control her/his behavior can be both physically and emotionally harmful. As women supporting women we need to develop new and better ways of dealing with our children and supporting each other in exploring different ways to do so. We have nothing to lose except a little pride in admitting we've all made mistakes in raising children; we have everything to gain in recognizing those mistakes and moving on together.

–Nathalie Paven, with
Trish Cannon and
Jane Weiss

Mothers And Mothering

The role of mothers and mothering has not been adequately addressed and has often been paid only lip service in the women's movement in general and the battered women's movement in particular.

Mothering is an overwhelming, awesome responsibility.* To be responsible for the well being of a child's life is an important job, a job that places great demands for time and energy on women who are mothers; a job as valuable as any job that a woman may do for pay. It saddens me to see women who feel unconscious pressure not to talk with other women about their children and about the experience of being a mother. If the movement is about choices and choosing, choosing to be a mother should be a role that the movement and women in general respect and support.** There are various organizations and support groups within the women's movement that address women's health issues, going back to school, assertiveness training, etc. But there are very few support groups about raising children and dealing with that stress and still trying to be part of a movement that is about women.

As a mother my role is an important and valuable one. To be able to produce a well-adjusted assertive female, especially a black one, is a time consuming job, a job just like going to work every day. If women are going to raise female children to be feminist and part of the movement, and male children to be sensitive and caring, support must be given to that role. The children need to see their mothers happy in the role of raising them, feeling good about, and supported for, being mothers.

I am not saying that mothering is for everyone—that every woman has to do it. It's about making choices and feeling good and supported in that choice, whatever it is. I do not want, and refuse to be made, to feel guilty about my child and her role in my life and my responsibility to her.

Some Suggestions

What I want to offer here are suggestions to groups which might help women feel more supported as mothers.

- Offer to have meetings in the homes of women who have children.
- Have the group as a whole share the cost of childcare or have childcare within a meeting.
- Encourage the participation of children in meetings, if only as an introduction of the children to the group to make them aware of the importance of the meeting and the mother being there, and thanking the children for their cooperation.
- Listen to and be responsive to a woman being late because of emergency crises, sickness, etc., of her children. Give her the space to talk about unreliable babysitters, childcare, etc., because if her concerns about her children are not met, she will not be able to provide what she wants to a group. She will be worried or concerned about her children.
- Be sensitive about meeting times and possible conflicts: 5:30 is dinner time, 8-8:30 is bedtime.
- Children are people too. They have feelings and concerns. Offer to take some responsibility individually, to help with a woman's children.
- At events, conferences, etc., there could be not only childcare provided but participation of children in workshops or in events, in health, nutrition and various other areas.

If a woman works, and her child is in school or childcare, evening may be the only time she has to spend with her child. Be sensitive about asking her to work on specific family-type holidays; support her participation in her children's education, including parent-teacher meetings, PTA and school functions. Allow her to have time off—maybe her children's birthdays and Halloween.

Single women take many things for granted, like: eating out, being able to go out after a meeting to talk or have a drink, reading a book or magazine uninterrupted, taking a bath, talking on the phone uninterrupted or sleeping late. Remember these are luxuries to mothers.

The issue of mothering touches the shelter movement on several levels. One is that there are various philosophies in different shelters concerning salaries. Should all staff people be paid the same whether or not they have children? Should mothers receive special benefits? Does the shelter pay a living wage or are the salaries prohibitive to mothers, in which case, could supplements be provided to mothers in the form of childcare or reimbursement for childcare expenses?

The obstacles for a battered woman to overcome are numerous. To add children to the list may only add more

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**Though this would be true under any circumstance, it is made all the more so by the denial of the value and importance of mothering in this society, and the fact that women usually carry the sole responsibility for childrearing. The contradiction is that on the one hand motherhood and childrearing are sanctified and glorified, while on the other, women and children are impoverished on AFDC and women's ability to support their children is obstructed through lack of childcare, decent jobs, etc.*

***Though it should be a choice, obviously not all women who become mothers choose to do so. The unavailability of abortions to poor women and the lack of access to contraception for some women as well as some women being forced/coerced by their husbands to have children all obstruct women's choice about motherhood.*

Child Abuse And Child Sexual Assault

Introduction

Child abuse affects many of the women and children using our programs. First, many women who are being battered by their husbands and boyfriends were battered as children, often having never received support for dealing with their feelings about it. Second, some of their children have been victims of abuse from the battering men. In fact, many women, valuing their children more than themselves, leave violent homes only when their children have been abused or molested by the abuser. Third, some women behave abusively toward their children. This can happen for a number of reasons, some of which are that they have learned violence from their parents or husbands as a method of control, and that the enormous difficulties of raising children can be overwhelming, especially without support. Some women become mothers because of circumstances beyond their control, and would not have chosen to have children if they'd had greater freedom of choice. Some of the anger they may have internalized because of this may at times be externalized or projected on to their children. (Given recent decisions on Medicaid funding for abortions and other indications of the reactionary movement in this country, more women will become mothers out of necessity rather than choice.) Sometimes the pressures put on mothers to perform perfectly and to make their children perform perfectly are too great.

What Child Abuse is

We therefore need to understand what child abuse is and how we might effectively deal with it in our work. Many parents believe in hitting as a method of discipline; though many of us may not agree with this, and we set a rule against any hitting in our program, it is not necessarily abuse. Every parent loses her/his temper sometimes and can behave destructively toward children, yet such episodic abuse is not child abuse either. According to Parents Anonymous*, if the abuse becomes an ongoing pattern, then it is a behavioral problem and is, in fact, child abuse. They define six forms of abuse:

Physical Abuse: Any injury to a child other than injury sustained accidentally; that is, willful cruelty and applied trauma; it includes handling a child as a means of venting anger, with no intent of discipline.

Physical Neglect: Lack or proper amount of food, clothing, medical care, attention to hygiene, etc.; lack of parental guidance, supervision and general care.

Sexual Abuse: Includes both actively engaging in sexual relations with a child and passively taking no action to prevent sexual abuse when aware it is happening.

Verbal Abuse: Includes the use of insulting language about or to the child to scold harshly or revile; includes words aimed at tearing down or destroying a child's self image.

Emotional Abuse: Includes providing a child with a negative emotional atmosphere; destroying the child's self image, not giving support but only criticism, etc. All other forms of abuse are automatically emotionally abusive.

Emotional Neglect: Passive emotional abuse: showing the child neither warmth nor anger; showing neither hate nor love; indicating to the child that she/he is an unwanted bother.

Why Child Abuse Happens

It happens for many reasons. Violence is often used as a means of control, based on a belief that through authority and control we can force "good behavior." Parents receive little training in parenting and most of what is learned perpetuates a notion of the family as a hierarchy with the man on top, the woman in the middle, and the children on the bottom, each supposed to respect and fear those above. Men are generally taught that their role is as authority figures for children. Women are taught that they are totally responsible for every action and attitude of their children.

It's important to remember that although people often think of women when they think of battering parents, it is not just women. In fact, although men are with their children far less often and are less affected by the children's behavior than women, they are often perpetrators of violence against children. Fathers are often more feared by their children than mothers. Further, it is fathers (and uncles, brothers, etc.) who commit incest against their daughters and sons. 90% of child sexual assault cases are of fathers or stepfathers abusing daughters or stepdaughters. It's also important to keep in mind that, contrary to the image portrayed by the media, child abuse crosses all race, class, ethnic and cultural lines.

**Parents Anonymous is an advocacy organization of and for parents who have abused or do abuse their children. It provides support groups, hotlines, etc.*

For women there is tremendous pressure to live up to a norm of "perfect" mothering. Women who have the additional stress of having been beaten themselves and perhaps beaten and/or humiliated in front of their children, face even greater difficulty in maintaining self respect and the respect of their children. Such pressure can (but does not necessarily) lead to abusive behavior. Other women have been forced to discipline their children, sometimes harshly, in an effort to spare the children and themselves greater violence from the abusive man.

What We Can Do:

In cases of women who were battered or sexually molested as children, we can offer them a chance, perhaps their first, to talk about it. Incest abuse particularly causes tremendous trauma for its victims, which lasts long after the abuse itself. Because discussing it has been so taboo, women need to hear that they are not alone. They need a chance to discuss it without being judged or blamed, and need to be able to vent their feelings and get support. Some women might appreciate being referred to a support group for women who were incest victims, or to counseling oriented around the experience.

For children who are currently or have recently been victims of child abuse or child sexual assault, it's important to provide the same safe space and encouragement to talk that we provide their mothers. Childcare workers, if there are any, and staff, should assist children in exploring and discussing, with each other and with adults, their feelings about their experiences. Again, some women may request counseling or other referrals for their children.

Lastly, we must deal with instances of mothers abusing their children, when they come up. We focus the rest of this article on this not because it happens all the time, but because it is the most difficult situation for all of us. We want to provide a safe place for women and not to give them a hard time about, or interfere with, their childrearing. It's very hard to report child abuse because we know that the welfare system is not designed to provide good support and resources for women and their children when they get reported.

But, no matter how difficult or embarrassing it is, we must interrupt violence—especially if it's ongoing abuse. We need to support women to change their abusive behavior because we have a responsibility to prevent situations in which children may be endangered by their mothers.

We need to provide women with the space to be really honest and clear about what they're feeling and thinking, and we need to give them support and encouragement. However, we also need to be upfront that we can't accept abusive behavior, will support her to change, and if she consistently refuses to deal with it, we may be forced to file a Report of Abuse (51A) to the Welfare Department.

While we are not spies and should not be intrusive or make women feel they're being watched, there are possible indicators of child abuse of which we should be aware. We should also realize that there can be cultural or class bias in determining what is neglectful. We should be careful not to impose our personal values on others. For instance, many children in low-income families share a bed—a situation which might be viewed as neglectful by some social workers but certainly is not harmful (and may be a positive experience) for children. Another example of a biased value judgment is assuming that a healthy diet necessitates meat (because that's what your family believed), and that a child who hasn't had any meat for a week is being neglected. In fact, if the child has had rice and beans or another protein, her diet is perfectly adequate—just different.

With these things in mind, we still need to be aware of what might indicate that a child is being abused or neglected by her/his mother, so that we can help the family to deal with this, and perhaps avoid welfare intervention. The following "indicators" should be viewed as just that—indicators, not decisive rules. Some are very vague and generalized; they are meant to be taken into consideration only as part of the overall circumstances.

Indicators

- ***In The Child's Appearance:***
  - *the child shows evidence of repeated injuries inappriate for her/his age.*
  - *the child has patches of hair missing, bruises or wounds in various stages of healing, or injuries that are inappropriately treated.*
  - *the child is overly thin, constantly tired or showing signs of malnutrition.*
  - *the child is consistently unclean or unbathed.*
- ***In The Child's Behavior:***
  - *the child is unduly afraid of her/his mother or unusually afraid in general.*
  - *the child is overly passive, withdrawn or complains or cries often.*
  - *the child is aggressive, disruptive or destructive.*
  - *the child is overly protective and reverses the role of parent/child with mother.*
- ***In The Mother's Behavior:***
  - *she consistently describes the child as bad; is overly critical or is an unnecessarily strict disciplinarian.*
  - *she is unconcerned about her child.*
  - *she has unrealistic expectations and standards for the child, way beyond her/his age level.*
  - *she offers unconvincing or contradictory explanation of child's injuries.*
  - *she consistently ignores child's crying or reacts with extreme impatience.*

If a child exhibits some of these indicators, you should check out whether it is a result of the father's abuse or the mother's before making assumptions. If you feel that the man may have abused the child and the woman hasn't talked about that already, ask her if he beat the child as well as herself. Do so in such a way that you let her know that you don't blame her for it, because she may feel guilty or responsible. She might have been too afraid to intervene, or might have tried to without success, but she should be supported because she did get out of the violence.

It's also possible that a woman is neglecting her child because of the immediate crisis and that it is not indicative of long term neglect. If she is depressed, she may have stopped caring for herself, and then it's hard to care for her children. In such a case, a woman needs a lot of immediate support and help caring for her children; perhaps staffers or other women at the program can assist her temporarily.

Interrupt Abuse

If you see a woman abuse her child or believe she is abusive, approach her directly and express your concern. Discuss her options with her. She may well be defensive because she feels guilty, doesn't know how to cope or feels threatened. Listen carefully to what she is saying: is she hearing your concern, is she worried about her behavior, is she interested in changing it, is she too overwhelmed to deal with the kids, does she not want to have her children . . .?

Show respect for her, understanding of the pressure she's under and acknowledgement of the hard work she has put into her family. Don't make judgments about what she says or what she's doing. Encourage her to think creatively of ways to balance her own needs with those of her children. Help her to think through what support she needs and if possible, help her find it within the program or through other resources or from her own family and friends.

Although she already knows it, remind her that she is responsible for her children and that no matter what pressure she is feeling, she has no right to take it out on them. Encourage her to think of ways to cool off when she feels pressure building. She should be encouraged to think of taking time away from her children if she needs it and assisted in figuring out how to do so.

Alert other staff to her need for extra support and to the potential risk that the children are in. Give her the appropriate referrals for support, services, counseling or whatever she might need.

If The Situation Becomes Critical:

a) the abuse or neglect is ongoing and the woman is unresponsive to concern and suggestions

Or

b) the abuse seemingly will continue after the family leaves and they are about to go,

Then:

- assist the woman in finding temporary foster care, preferably through personal connections such as trusted family members or friends; *OR*
- suggest that she consider voluntarily placing her children in a foster home through a private agency such as Catholic Charities (make sure to check out the reputation/record of the agency—some have been very unsupportive of women and some are as bad as protective services); *OR*
- explain that, as a last resort, you will file a 51A (Report of Abuse). This decision should never be made by one staff person alone; it could affect the woman and her children for the rest of their lives.

The Law And Protective Services

By law, (Mass. General Laws, chapter 51A), we are considered mandatory reporters: if we have reasonable cause to believe that a child under 18 years is suffering serious physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse or neglect, we are required to report the situation orally to the Department of Social Services (DSS) immediately and file a written report within 48 hours.

The report, known as a *51A report,* is supposed to contain the names and addresses of the child and her/his parents; the child's age and sex; the nature and extent of abuse or neglect; the circumstances under which the reporter (us) became aware of the situation; what action, if any, was taken to assist the child; and the name(s) of the person(s) making the report.

The Department of Social Services, on receiving a *51A Report,* is supposed to:

- investigate and evaluate the information;
- evaluate the household and determine the risk of injury to any other child;
- take the child into immediate temporary custody if the department believes that "the removal of the child is necessary to protect him/her from further abuse or neglect"; then file a petition for removal and temporary custody on the next court day;
- offer the family appropriate social services;
- file information from the report in the permanent central registry of Welfare.

Protective Services is the section of DSS which is responsible for receiving and investigating 51A reports and providing appropriate services to the family. They may do an initial investigation into the 51A report and decide that the children are not in need of services or intervention by DSS. If they feel that the family is in need of services, however, they can provide childcare, homemaker services and other special and potentially helpful social services.

A Protective Services worker will be assigned to the woman's case for investigation and any necessary follow-up. This worker will be responsible for determining what services, if any, the family needs, and whether or not (or under what conditions) the children can remain with their mother. It is important, therefore, for the mother to establish a good working relationship with the worker, though this can be difficult because the mother may view protective services as a threat to her family. We may be able to help by intervening for her at times to make sure that her interests and needs are considered and that necessary services are actually being provided by the department.

Unfortunately, Protective Service workers usually have a tremendous workload, and thus can fail to provide adequate support and/or services; the worker may do a superficial investigation which makes the mother simply feel spied upon and unhelped in changing the abusive situation. Workers also tend to share the same attitudes of welfare workers in general (see *Dealing With The Welfare System*), often making value judgments based on white, middle-class concepts about what "proper" childrearing is, failing or refusing to appreciate the enormous difficulties and pressures for mothers raising children.

Some workers don't recognize or acknowledge the danger and pressure under which a battered woman tries to manage her day-to-day work, including childrearing. They often blame women for "putting up with" being beaten, and endangering the children as a result. Sometimes they take children away, not because they are being beaten, but because the battering of their mother creates a bad environment for them! In fact, the worker may think that it's easier/simpler to take the children away from the woman rather than to help her escape the man's violence. This, however, fails to recognize the extreme trauma which separation from their mother will cause the children, who have already been traumatized by the abuse their mother has suffered. It is difficult under those circumstances, however, for the woman to convince the worker of other alternatives. This is why the woman needs an advocate to help her deal with Protective Services. We, as advocates, can try to persuade the worker to provide services to the woman and her children that will make things easier for them and help protect them from the abusive man without separation. Sometimes this is not realistic or the worker will not agree to it.

If the worker decides that providing services (e.g., counseling, homemaking, etc.) is not enough to make it safe for the children to remain with their mother, s/he can follow two general routes. S/he may try to persuade the woman to agree to enter into a voluntary foster care agreement, or may get DSS to file a care and protection action on the children. This action can be filed in the probate, district or Boston Juvenile Court. Through this action DSS may get custody of the children including the right to decide where the children shall reside (i.e., in a foster home). To get custody the department must prove that the children are "at risk" (physical or emotional danger) in the home. If DSS files a care and protection action, the mother will be entitled to an appointed lawyer if she cannot afford to hire one. She can request that a particular lawyer be appointed for her and paid by the county. We may be able to suggest sympathetic lawyers to represent her.

If the woman agrees to a voluntary foster placement, DSS will enter into a written agreement with her which sets out the time limits, what other services will be provided, etc. If she has family or friends who are willing to act as foster parents, she can suggest them. If placement with family or friends is realistic under the circumstances, the department should go along with it. Otherwise, Protective Services will choose the foster home.

The agreement will state that the mother has the right to terminate the voluntary agreement at any time by giving two weeks notice to DSS. However, if the department believes that the children would still be at risk with their mother, it can file a care and protection action immediately and try to get legal custody of the children before the two week period is over.

It is important that the mother keep up whatever her end of the agreement is (e.g., visit at least once a week, etc.) to show the department that she is concerned about her kids and working to get them back with her. While the children are in foster care, if the department believes that the mother (and/or father) will be unable to care for her children at the end of one year, it can ask the court to grant permanent custody to the department and ask that the children be placed for adoption without the parents' consent. If the department took such action each parent would be entitled to an appointed lawyer and each or both could ask for custody against the department's request.

Given this potential danger, it is critical that the mother have a lot of emotional support and any necessary intervention by an advocate while her children are in foster care. She'll need a lot of encouragement to see the children as often as possible (even though she may be going through a very difficult and draining period too) and to meet any other obligations (e.g., counseling) she has acquired by agreement or by court order. With support she'll be in a much better position to make decisions and follow through with them, and to take care of herself and her children.

—Gail Sullivan and
Chris Butler

from photo by Ellen Shub

Chapter 4:

Advocacy—Welfare And Legal

Social Services Advocacy

Advocacy As Empowerment

Our most important consideration when doing any form of advocacy is the style we use. Our style should reflect our philosophy which is based on the goal of helping to empower women. The question we need to be asking ourselves about every advocacy interaction is, "Will it help the woman gain understanding to deal more effectively with her situation and make necessary changes?" The answer will more likely be 'yes' if our concept of an advocate's role is based on encouraging self-reliance and providing information which will enable women *to do for themselves* rather than on a willingness to *do for* women. In our honest desire to be helpful to battered women we must be careful not to foster dependency. It will be much more beneficial to a woman if we respect her ability to control her own life and provide her with more tools to strengthen that ability.

Your role as advocate with a woman is to provide moral support and information about resources, rules and the ways things work. If you plan to accompany a woman to court or to the welfare department, let her know ahead of time that you would like her to speak for herself. When you interact with people in agencies, provide an assertive role model—be persistent, but diplomatic.

If you are a white woman advocating for a woman of color, it is important for you to be aware that your white privilege plus class and educational privilege will afford you much better treatment by the different institutions. You may be treated like a human being, while a Black woman or woman of color will be mistreated or made to feel totally invisible. In our white society, Black people and people of color are seen as freeloaders (whether on welfare or not), whereas a white person receiving assistance (financial or otherwise) would not be used to stereotype the whole race.

At all times build a woman's confidence by encouraging her to recognize and act on her right to ask questions and demand services. "Demystify" institutions —let her know that they will not seem so "big and scary" as she learns the ropes of getting what she wants. Help her to feel "as good as anyone else" by respecting her abilities and values. Be sure to sort out what is your agenda (your goals and values) from hers. Be supportive, but don't let a woman give up her power to you and don't take it from her.

Whenever possible, encourage a woman who has been through the system to help another woman to go to court or welfare. It will enable the woman with previous experience to realize her ability to help other women to take control over their lives, thus increasing her own sense of power. Furthermore, by seeing that her peer can help her, the woman being assisted may begin to believe that she, too, can deal effectively with institutions.

A simple rule of thumb to follow in deciding your role as advocate is to ask yourself, "Is this something a woman can do for herself with information and support? or is it something another shelter resident or support group member can do with her? " If the answer to both is no, it probably means that you as a staffer should do it with her.

In order to understand advocacy as a way to empower women, it might be helpful to discuss some styles of advocacy that are *not* empowering.

The first of these is aggressive advocacy where the advocate conceives of her role as taking over and doing everything, often leaving the woman out of the picture entirely. This style is often tempting to us because of our desire to be helpful or to save time.

Another is "ass-kissing" in which the advocate plays up to her contacts in agencies to get what the woman needs. Both of these styles can be entrapping because workers in other agencies often would rather deal with our workers (shades of classism and racism) than the women themselves. The two workers engage in a dialogue about what services the woman needs, again rendering her invisible and not in control of her life.

Passive, surrendering advocacy occurs when the advocate herself lacks confidence, is easily intimidated by institutions, and gives up her power to others. It is a "could I please have?" rather than a "we would like" attitude. An advocate with this attitude is easily overwhelmed and generally gives up when any obstacle is encountered.

Then there is the "do-gooder, bleeding-heart social worker" style of advocacy based on a "poor thing" attitude. Again, this style smacks of classism disguised as sympathy. The worker feels sorry for the woman and is easily hooked into trying to make things better, too often doing things for the woman that she is perfectly capable of doing for herself. The goal of our advocacy work should always be to increase a woman's skills and her ability to take care of herself.

Common Attitudes of Welfare Workers

When dealing with the welfare system, you will encounter many negative and degrading attitudes. It's helpful to know what attitudes you can expect to find and what you can realistically expect to accomplish there. Some of the attitudes are ingrained in the system, rather like "institutional body language."

For instance, the term "recipient" implies an attitude that welfare is a handout rather than an economic right to which people are entitled. The inadequate assistance available from welfare indicates to women that their lives are barely worth preserving and that the work they do to keep homes and raise children is not valued. Women are penalized for not fitting the proper stereotype: married and supported by husbands.* Welfare is probably the only institution in our society which pressures women to work outside the home. However, it does very little to assist women in getting training, education and placements which would enable them to earn a *decent* living. Because women earn 56% of what men do and must pay childcare and other costs, mothers without education or training are often better off on welfare than off.

Another destructive attitude of welfare is that low income people are untrustworthy. There is a prying, "What are you doing or getting that you're not telling us about?" suspicion. While it is true that some people would rip off the welfare system, everyone must pay the price of suspicion. Moreover, inability to live on the assistance often forces women to cheat in order to provide for their children.

Women on welfare have no power over the system that controls their means of survival. Decisions affecting their lives are made for them without allowing them any say. Once again, the message is that they don't matter and aren't capable of making decisions.

Welfare workers act as though they have the right to ask whatever questions they choose about a woman's life, and that she is obliged to answer them. This is not true, yet many welfare mothers don't know that.

Many workers have a resentful attitude towards women needing welfare, as though the money were coming out of their own pockets. Such workers are likely to withhold information from a woman about the assistance to which she might be entitled.

Another problem that women often encounter at the welfare office is insensitivity to crises. A woman whose husband has taken off with the food stamps and welfare check leaving her with nothing, will probably be told, "We can't help you. The rules say that once a check has been issued, we can't issue another one."

The negative attitudes of caseworkers to their clients have a direct relationship to the racial identity of those clients. As mentioned previously, all Black people and people of color are seen as freeloaders by the white society. The system's hatred and disrespect of women and poor people becomes magnified when the woman is a woman of color. Individual workers at the welfare office have often internalized these attitudes.

Though you may find some social workers with respectful and cooperative attitudes towards people, even the best have a hard time maintaining that in the face of the overwhelming condescension and suspicion towards welfare recipients. Also, they are limited by what the system permits them to do. It is important to remember that most caseworkers have no training in social work, underpaid, and have heavy caseloads. They have little or no power to change rules and procedures. They are the frontline workers, dishing out and taking the crap. We should direct our challenges and anger to supervisors, local directors and the welfare system itself, through appeals, negotiations, class action suits or other activity. (see section: What to do if a Woman Gets a Hard Time)

from photo in the *Foxfire Book*

Because welfare attitudes tend to be contradictory to our goals of empowerment and support for women, it is important to inform women about the attitudes and limitations of the welfare system. Women can at least be prepared for the frustration and be encouraged to keep their sense of their own identity and self worth. They should be informed that they don't have to answer any questions other than those on their personal applications and that they are not required to provide details about their personal lives.

We need to balance our warnings and negative criticisms with encouragement that women should get all that they can out of welfare, even though it's limited. If women approach the system with a sense of self worth and their right to have assistance, they will get more from it. We should also encourage women to link up with other women and with welfare activist groups for support and to have some positive impact on this system which is so significant in their lives.

— Tish Sinclair

In fact, only 7% of people in the U.S. live in families where the man is the sole breadwinner, the woman at home taking care of kids.

Welfare Information

This section provides basic information about the major Welfare programs as they relate to battered women. It is not complete because welfare is governed by multitudinous rules and regulations which are complex and change frequently. Your own experience will be the best teacher: your knowledge of welfare's ins and outs will grow as you do the work.

AFDC
(Aid to Families with Dependent Children)

Who Is Eligible for AFDC?

- A woman with dependent children under 18 (21 if they are in school or training) who are living with her
- A pregnant woman with no other children

IF:

The father(s) is absent from the home, unemployed, incapacitated or dead; *and* she has little or no income, and assets (savings) less than $1,000 (she can own the home in which the family lives and one car).

If Eligible, What Will A Woman Receive?

- A check every two weeks based on the size of her family and their income, if any.
- Medicaid
- Food stamps
- Emergency Assistance
- Welfare Social Services

GR (General Relief)

Who Is Eligible for General Relief?

- A woman without children or a woman whose children are not living with her

IF:

She is unemployable, unable to work for physical or emotional reasons (she will need a doctor's statement verifying this), *and*

She has less than $500 in assets (usually savings).

If Eligible, What Will A Woman Receive?

- A check every two weeks based on her living situation (if she lives with others, it will be less)
- Limited Medicaid Coverage
- Food Stamps

Food Stamps

Food stamps can only be used for edible items, no household, toiletry or paper products are covered.

Women receiving strictly AFDC or GR will automatically receive an amount of food stamps each month determined by the size of their family. There is no charge for food stamps. Women with other income (wages, child support, unemployment, etc.) may still be eligible for limited food stamps. Encourage any low or moderate income woman to apply for Food Stamps, especially if she has high living costs, or medical, school or other large expenses.

Anyone in 'dire need' may receive Emergency Food Stamps *immediately*. Women not already receiving food stamps, who have little or no money, should definitely get Emergency Food Stamps when they come to the shelter or safehome.

Medicaid

Medicaid is as good as medical insurance. It will pay for doctors' visits, hospitalization, prescriptions, etc. Restrictions are placed on "less important" medical services (dental care, eyeglasses, some prescriptions, etc.) and verification of need is required for some services. Anyone seeking medical care under Medicaid should inform the doctor/hospital that she will be using Medicaid so that she can be informed of any current restrictions or requirements.

Women receiving AFDC will automatically get *full* Medicaid coverage for themselves and their children. It may also be available to low or moderate income families not on welfare, especially if they have large medical expenses. Women receiving GR will get very limited Medicaid coverage. It will not pay for inpatient or outpatient hospitalization services, except for life-sustaining drugs. There are many restrictions on other services and the coverage for women on GR is grossly inadequate. Nonetheless, a women on GR should check with the welfare office to see exactly what medical care she can get. Again, encourage anyone who might be eligible to apply.

Women applying for welfare who have no other medical insurance are entitled to a Temporary Medicaid Card. Battered women should ask to receive one immediately, because they may need medical attention.

Other Welfare Services

Emergency Assistance

Emergency Assistance provides some assistance with unpaid rent, mortgage, fuel and/or utility bills after a woman has exhausted whatever aid she can get from her local community action program. Moving expenses, beds, and washing machines are no longer available, but a woman can still get a stove or refrigerator if the place in which she lives doesn't have them or hers cannot be repaired. Flood and fire victims may still receive assistance for clothing and household equipment.

This program is a focus in the battle between welfare recipients and the state. It has been cut, but broader assistance may be reinstated. Therefore, advocates should keep informed of changes.

WIN

WIN is supposed to help women get training and find jobs. A woman on AFDC is required to participate in this program once her youngest child reaches the age of 6 unless she has a doctor's statement saying that she is unable to work for physical or emotional reasons. Any woman on AFDC who wants to work should check into this program.

Women on welfare may also get Basic Educational Opportunity grants, state scholarships and other types of financial aid in order to go to college or trade school.

Childcare

Day care or reimbursement for private childcare ('babysitting') is available to a woman on AFDC if she is working, going to school or job training, or too sick to care for her children. (Daycare slots funded by welfare are usually very limited.)

Other Economic Assistance

SSI (Supplemental Security Income)
available through Social Security Administration

A woman is eligible if she is over 65, blind, or disabled (physically or emotionally) with an impairment so bad that either she cannot work for at least 12 months or will die within 12 months. SSI pays more than welfare and she will receive Medicaid.

WIC (Women, Infants and Children)
available in many but not all communities through local WIC office

Women who are pregnant or who have children under 5 can get *free* coupons for supplemental food. It will not affect the amount of food stamps they can get. WIC coupons cover formula, cereal, eggs, milk, cheese, etc.

Unemployment
available through local office of Division of Employment Security

A woman may be eligible for unemployment if she quits her job because of having to leave a violent man. Unemployment compensation will equal approximately half of her gross (before taxes) wage. She will not receive AFDC if the amount of unemployment is equal to or greater than what she would receive from AFDC. Women on unemployment may be eligible for Food Stamps and Medicaid.

Mass. Rehabilitation Commission

They can help a woman receive education or training if she qualifies under their guidelines as disabled for physical or emotional reasons.

Note: The Coalition for Basic Human Needs (10 West Street, Boston, MA 02116) *is a statewide organization of and for low income people (mostly women). They are a political action/advocacy group and usually an excellent source of information about welfare and legislation affecting low income people.*

How To Apply For Welfare Assistance

If A Woman Doesn't Have Welfare

1. A woman should ask to see the intake worker. She should ask her/him to inform her of all assistance to which she may be entitled and for any help she may need in filling out the application. After filling out the application, she should ask for Emergency Food Stamps and a Temporary Medicaid Card. She should ask for the names of any welfare workers with whom she meets.

2. A woman will need to prove her identity, that her children are hers, and that she is financially eligible. She must bring the following documents or arrange to get them as soon as possible (her application will not be processed until these are in):

- Verification of marriage, divorce, protective orders, etc.
- Birth certificates of the children (baptismal or school records are acceptable replacements). Non-citizens may use their Alien Registration Receipt Card.
- Social Security Card. Her children will also need them if they don't have them.
- Verification of the past 5 weeks' earnings, if any (pay stubs, check copies).
- A woman at home or going home will need her latest rent receipt. A woman in a shelter will need a statement to the effect that she and her children are residents and what fee, if any, they pay.
- Verification of any and all resources (i.e., bank books, trust funds, etc.).

Encourage women who are coming into the shelter to bring all important papers with them, if possible.

3. Make sure that she knows shelter policy regarding what address she should use on her application. She should be reminded not to divulge the actual shelter location. Even though welfare regulations prohibit giving a recipient's whereabouts away, she should explicitly ask that her file be marked: address not to be given to anyone, including husband or relatives.

4. A woman is required to cooperate with the "Parent Locator Program," which attempts to collect child support from absent fathers. She is expected to provide them with permission and information. However, if a local welfare office goes after a violent man for support, it indicates to him her whereabouts. A battered woman can get a "good cause exemption" which stipulates that welfare will not seek child support if it can be established that to do so would place the woman or her children in physical or emotional danger. If she feels she should be exempt, she should inform the worker of her desire for that status and refuse to sign those papers. You can assist her in substantiating her claim. Police, court, medical and social service records, including a letter from the shelter, can all be used to back her claim.

5. Welfare regulations state that a decision must be made on a woman's application for assistance within 30 days, provided that the documentation has been received. It generally takes 2 to 4 weeks.

6. A woman must be notified of any adverse decisions and reductions in assistance. She is entitled to appeal

any decision that she believes incorrect.

If A Woman Already Receives Welfare

1. She must contact her old caseworker immediately.
2. If the welfare was in her name, she should tell the caseworker to send her checks, food stamps, etc. to the shelter's mailing address. She should tell her/him not to give out her address to anyone. If her move means that she is under jurisdiction of a different welfare office, she should ask that her case be transferred *open* to the new local office. If her most recent check has just been sent, and it would be unsafe for her or someone else to pick it up, she should call the post office and tell them to hold her check and to give it to her in person.
3. If the welfare was in her husband's name, she should tell her old caseworker to *close* the case and to transfer it to the nearest local welfare office. She will then need to reapply in her own name.

What To Do If A Woman Gets A Hard Time

In general women applying for welfare are clearly eligible and there should be no problems. Most women, given the appropriate information, should be able to deal with the welfare office on their own. The presence of an advocate is seldom warranted unless a woman requests emotional support, is denied or not informed of a benefit to which she is entitled, or the situation is complicated by unusual circumstances. Often the best advocate is another woman going through the same situation. Some situations, however, may require an advocate. When encountering difficulties with a worker:

1. Ask to see her/his supervisor.
2. Inform the supervisor of the problem and ask for more information and a decision to resolve the problem. If you are still unsatisfied, ask to see the manual citation on which the decision is based.
3. If it is still unclear that they're right, or circumstances warrant a different interpretation, explain your reasoning. If a satisfactory resolution isn't reached, ask for a written notice of the adverse decision and appeal it.
4. Document your efforts: who you spoke with and what the outcome was.

Some of the problems likely to be encountered can be resolved by asking the worker to refer to memo #AP-78-68, written at the request of battered women service groups. It states:

- Residence: A temporary shelter for battered women meets the AFDC definition of "residence." A staffer should provide a statement verifying that the applicant is a resident of the shelter.
- Home visit: Residence in a shelter for battered women constitutes "a sound and compelling reason" of the type for which the CSAD/WSO Director may waive the home visit requirement.
- Check Delivery: The check may be sent to a U.S. Post Office box or the office of the shelter service provider.
- Assistance Programs: The applicant should be informed of programs and benefits for which she may be eligible.

—Tish Sinclair

Legal Advocacy

Note: For specific information on the Abuse Prevention Act and protective orders please refer to the APA outline that follows this overview and ***A Woman's Guide to the APA****.*

Introduction To The Legal System

The legal system is broken into two general categories: civil and criminal. The civil category usually concerns two or more persons who are involved in some matter that has caused harm to one or more of them. For example, if two people are in a car accident, one might sue the other for money, claiming that the other person was at fault. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts doesn't have any interest in this private dispute because it doesn't "affect the stability of the state" or the health, welfare and safety of Mass. residents generally. On the other hand, a criminal action (e.g., one person presses assault and battery charges against another), by definition affects these things because the law has been violated. The state issues a complaint against the offender and asks the court to punish (or reform) the offender supposedly to protect the state's interest in preserving the peace and safeguarding its citizens. In a civil action the woman chooses whether or not to file and follow through with the case; in a criminal action, the state decides whether or not to take the case and how to handle it.

This can get very confusing when one court can handle both civil and criminal cases; for example, the district courts handle criminal complaints like assault and battery and civil cases like abuse prevention. The court you're in, therefore, does not automatically determine whether the legal action is civil or criminal. As advocates the two courts that you will regularly use are the district court and the probate court. District courts handle civil and criminal matters; probate courts handle only civil matters. Both district and probate courts handle abuse prevention cases which are civil in nature.

The criminal courts have traditionally ignored criminal cases involving spouses or household members. Most such cases never go to trial because the woman is intimidated by the abuser or the court into dropping the case. Many cases are dismissed or continued without a finding; of the few that go to trial with sufficient (overwhelming) evidence of guilt, most end in suspended sentences and/or probation. The man is then back on the street—or in the woman's home—in no time at all. The following overview therefore does not deal with the criminal system but rather uses examples from abuse prevention cases which are civil. The generalizations regarding attitudes toward women—particularly battered women and women of color, whether battered or not—apply equally to civil and criminal court personnel.

Going To Court

Always keep in mind that not every woman needs to go to court; it depends on the circumstances and on what she wants. (See ***A Woman's Guide to the Abuse Prevention Act*** for particulars on this.) Many battered women want to go to court because they think that the legal system exists to protect them. Laws, however, were made by and for white, middle class men, and most people working in the legal system have conservative/traditional ideas about men and women and their respective roles in society—particularly within the family. They accept the view that a man is the head of the household and that family matters are private and confidential. Because they have a vested interest in keeping families together and preserving the status quo, they will often downplay or ignore outright the danger that "staying together" will create for the woman by discouraging her from taking legal action against the abuser.

In district courts many judges and clerks consider abuse cases family matters that do not belong in their courts. Some make abusive comments about the woman living with someone to whom she is not married, or suggest that she's only going to make things worse for herself by taking him to court, or misinform her about the law and her rights. It is not unusual, for instance, for a married woman to be told that she must go to probate court and file for divorce, or for a single woman to be told that she must go to district court, or even that she is not entitled to orders because she is single. The law, in fact, gives both married and single women the right to file and to request protective orders in either the district, probate or superior court. The choice is hers, not the court's.

She must often face the judge in a public courtroom after waiting hours for her case to be called. Even if she has visible bruises and other evidence of battering, she may be asked a number of questions about the battering, and a number of irrelevant questions such as who pays the rent on her apartment, or what did she say or do to anger the abuser. In some cases a clerk or judge may accuse her of exaggerating or even lying about the violence. Some judges are more concerned with protecting a man's due process rights than with preserving a woman's physical safety. She may have come all this way fighting fear, embarrassment, lack of knowledge about the law, and perhaps a difficult clerk, only to be denied orders by the judge. If she gets her orders, she must then try to get the police to enforce them.

Because the legal system is intended primarily to protect the interests of white men of property, women of color often have an even more difficult time getting protective orders. Racist clerks and judges often assume that people of color are more violent than white people, and that some violence in the family should therefore be tolerated. (Similar assumptions are made about working class people.) Third World women thus have to deal with the racism of an almost-all-white environment at the courthouse, and then face blatant, overtly racist treatment by clerks and judges. Furthermore, if a woman comes away from that experience with protective orders, she must then deal with the police who are infamous for their hostility and racism toward all people of color.

Dealing With The Police

Although having protective orders makes things a little safer, women usually expect the orders to have a much greater impact on the abuser and the police than they generally have. The abuser may ignore the orders and continue to harass the woman; the police may not enforce the orders.

Despite the fact that the Mass. Abuse Prevention Act established certain basic responsibilities for the police, many officers have refused to meet them. For instance, the police now have the power to arrest a man who has violated protective orders as long as they have reasonable cause to believe that he violated them (whether or not they witnessed the violation). In most cases however, the police have outrightly refused to arrest even when they've actually witnessed a violation of orders. Similarly, when the police respond to a "domestic disturbance" call they have to inform a victim of abuse of her rights with a simple rights card in English and Spanish which details her legal rights and the officers' responsibilities. Many officers ignore this responsibility by simply telling the woman that they can't do anything and that she has to go to court, without any further information, explanation or support.

Back To Court

When the police refuse to enforce her protective orders, the woman may decide to press criminal charges against the abuser for violation of orders. In some very serious cases a police officer may arrest the abuser and press charges against him. In most cases, however, the woman will have to press charges against the abuser on her own in the district court for the place in which the violation occurred. Women trying to press criminal charges for violation of orders are often shuffled back and forth between probate and district court, each telling her that she must go to the other or between the district court which issued her orders and the district court for the area in which the violation occurred. Even if her case is taken seriously and the abuser is prosecuted, the most she can hope for is that he will be put on probation in the majority of abuse cases.

Legal Advocates

Where Do We Fit In?

Legal advocates have often been able to make the system work somewhat better for battered women. They usually are better able to persuade or argue with difficult clerks, fill out court forms, etc., because they are less

from photo by Ellen Shub

emotionally involved in the process. An advocate can often make the difference between a woman getting or not getting protective orders by stepping in when she is having difficulty explaining what has happened or what she needs.

The danger of this is that the advocate will take over for the woman and deny her the opportunity to be in control of the situation, or that the advocate will buy the myth that only "professional" or "semi-professional" people can effectively use the legal system. Many clerks and judges avoid dealing directly with battered women because they are elitist and want to deal with "professionals"; from their perspective, an advocate is the next best thing to a lawyer. Don't exclude the woman you're supporting from the process that is much more important to her than for you or the judge.

This is particularly destructive if the woman you're with is a woman of color and you are white. Judges and clerks are particularly disrespectful and contemptuous toward Third World women, and will use any means to exclude them from the process. Be sure that you're not reinforcing that behavior by appearing to be "providing social services" for this "unfortunate" woman who needs the help of white people to "straighten out" her life!

Before agreeing to go to court with a woman, make sure that that is what she wants to do and that she is aware of her options, both legal and non-legal. Explain the law to her and discuss what protective orders are available and what they can do and what they cannot do to help her, so that she can make an informed decision about whether or not to use the law.

If she chooses to go to court, you should discuss the facts with her ahead of time; in telling you about what happened (what the abuser did), the woman will get used to telling the story and be a little less embarrassed/intimidated once she's in court. You can also help the woman to write her affidavit (a written statement of facts signed under the penalties of perjury), if one is required by the court you are using. Explain the basic court procedures involved—where she'll stand, who she should talk to, what the judge or clerk might ask her, etc.

Part of our work is giving emotional support through the very difficult and emotionally draining experience of trying to use the legal system. A little pressure—or even a lot of indifference—could prevent a woman from demanding her legal rights. An advocate can prevent this from happening by supporting her in explaining her situation and intervening for her when the clerk is being pushy and/or giving her the wrong information (an all-too-frequent occurrence).

Dealing With Clerks And Judges As An Advocate

Be friendly and polite; dress well. It can get the woman's case called at a reasonable time, make the interview with the clerk less painful and get respect for you. Seeing you treated with respect can make things easier for the woman.

While it's important to act friendly and respectful to court personnel, it is also important to strike a balance between getting along with them and advocating for the woman. Don't be afraid to point out a mistake or misinformation by the clerk; don't hesitate to demand to see the judge if the clerk is refusing to deal with you. Like police, clerks will sometimes change their behavior toward you when you ask for their name or to see their superior. Gauge your behavior to theirs. When friendly persuasion doesn't work, don't be afraid to demand what the woman is entitled to by law or to express dissatisfaction.

When you get before the judge, explain who you are and that you are there to give the woman emotional support. If the judge excludes you from the process, there's nothing you can do; so if you're not sure what will happen till you actually speak to the judge, warn the woman that she may have to face the judge on her own. Judges are not necessarily any more sensitive or cooperative than clerks, but you and the woman should be aware that they have the power to hold you in contempt of court depending on your behavior.

If the woman gets her orders, make sure that she has a copy of them before you leave the courthouse that day, and that she understands them and knows when to come back to court for the second hearing. Remember that she may need your support even more during the second hearing if the abuser shows up at that time.

Finally, remember that your control of the situation is limited; there are some judges and clerks who will never be reformed. We can't expect to change a whole system and some of its most invested (and corrupted) members in a short time. Do as much as you can to help the woman through the process, but don't be afraid to suggest (remind her of) other options open to her. And even after a rash of courtroom successes, try not to forget that while we can make a difference in individual cases which affect women's lives, we cannot completely reform a system that is constantly reinforcing and perpetuating itself in patriarchal, racist and classist ideas and practices. Laws were established and are maintained by and for white middle class men, and it's going to take a long time to change that.

—*Chris Butler*

from photo in *Southern Exposure*

Abuse Prevention Act

The Massachusetts legislature passed the Abuse Prevention Act, Mass. General Law, chapter 209A, in July of 1978. Its purpose is to provide immediate protection to anyone being abused by a family or household member, and to provide better police protection and intervention in domestic violence cases. Although the law was primarily intended to meet the needs of battered women, it can be used by and against both men and women, adults and minors. In order to use the law to get protection you must have been abused by the person from whom you seek protection.

The Law Defines Abuse As

- **Causing or attempting to cause physical harm.** This means that the abuser physically hurt you or tried to hurt you, for instance, he threw something at you but missed.
- **Putting another in fear of imminent serious physical harm.** This means that the abuser did something that made you think you would be seriously hurt at any moment; for instance, he came toward you with his fists clenched to punch you, or threatened to kill you or beat you.
- **Causing another to engage involuntarily in sexual relations by force, threat of force or duress.** This means that the abuser made you have sexual relations with him by using physical force against you, threatening to use force, or threatening other things, for instance, to keep you locked up until you give in to his demands, or to harm your children.

Who Can Use The Abuse Prevention Act?

You can use this law if you have been abused by a:

Husband—whether or not you are living together
Ex-husband—whether or not you are living together
Blood relative—whether or not you are living together
Household member—anyone you live with, whether or not you are married or related.

What Kind Of Protection Can You Get?

You can ask for any or all of the following protective orders:

- **Temporary Restraining Order.** This orders the abuser not to hurt or bother you in any way.
- **Temporary Vacate Order.** This orders the abuser to leave the apartment or house you share with him (even if he pays the rent or mortgage and has his name alone on the lease or deed).
- **Temporary Custody Order.** This gives you legal custody of your child/ren and prohibits the abuser from taking them away.
- **Temporary Support Order.** This orders the abuser to give you money to support yourself and/or your child/ren if he is your husband and/or the father of your child/ren.
- **Monetary Compensation.** This orders the abuser to pay you for any expenses caused by the abuse, for instance, if you had to pay a doctor's or hospital bill, lost a day's wages, had to pay shelter expenses, etc.
- **Other Orders.** You can ask for any other orders that would protect you, for instance, an order that he return any keys he has to your house or apartment, an order that he stay away from your home and workplace, etc.

Once the abuser has been notified of the orders (he will receive them by mail or be handed them by a police officer or constable depending on the court you've used), they are criminally enforceable against him. This means that if he violates the temporary restraining or vacate order he has committed a crime and you can press charges against him for violation of orders in the district court for the area in which the violation took place.

How Do You Get These Protective Orders?

You must go to court for an emergency hearing (steps 1-4) and later for a second hearing sometimes called the "5-day hearing" (steps 5-7).

1. Go to the district, probate or superior court for the place where you live or where you are now staying (friend's, relative's, shelter).

2. Go to the Clerk of Court office and tell the clerk that you want to file an Abuse Prevention petition. They will give you a form to fill out that is easy to follow. You do not have to hire a lawyer or pay a filing fee.

3. The clerk will direct you to a courtroom or office for the emergency hearing after s/he's checked over the form. Wait for your case to be called and then explain to the judge why you need protective orders immediately.

4. The judge will decide whether to give you the orders you request. If your orders are granted, the judge will schedule the 2d hearing for within five days of this first one. *Be sure that you have a copy of the orders before you leave the courthouse that day.*

5. The abuser will be notified by mail or by police or constable; he will get a copy of the orders which will give the time and place of the 2d hearing.

6. This 2d hearing gives the abuser a chance to be heard by the judge; he can choose whether or not to show up. You must show up if you want your orders to continue in effect. (If an emergency comes up, call the clerk's office and ask them to reschedule [continue] the 5-day hearing.)

7. At the 5-day hearing the judge can extend the orders for up to one year; s/he can also issue new orders, for example, if your husband requests visitation rights with the children, the judge can include that in the orders.

Any or all of the order can be modified (changed) at any time by going back to court if circumstances have changed since you first got the orders. For instance, if the abuser was given reasonable visitation rights and he has been coming to your home at all hours, taking advantage of this arrangement, you could ask the judge to limit visitation to certain times (e.g., Saturdays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.). The orders can also be extended for an additional period when they are about to expire. Remember that you must obey the court orders too, and should not let the abuser back in your home while the vacate order is still in effect.

Police Responsibility Under The Abuse Prevention Act

The police must use *all reasonable means* to prevent further abuse. This includes but is not limited to:

- Remaining on the scene as long as there is danger to you, or protecting you in some other way such as waiting for you to get your things together to leave;
- Assisting you in getting medical treatment, including driving you to the hospital or getting you an ambulance if necessary;
- Giving you immediate and adequate notice of you rights; this means that the police must give you a card written in English and Spanish that tells you what legal action you can take against the abuser and what the police officer's responsibilities are. The card must be read to you and left with you;
- The police are not required to arrest the abuser, but have the power to if:
  - They have reasonable cause to believe that the abuser committed a felony (assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, or with intent to kill, maim or rape, etc.)—whether or not they saw him do it.
  - They actually saw him commit a misdemeanor other than violation of protective orders (assault and battery, trespass, etc.).
  - They have reasonable cause to believe that he violated your protective orders—whether or not they saw him do it.

—*Chris Butler*

Bonnie Acker
from photo by Ellen Shub

Chapter 5:

Around The Table—Issues Of Race, Class And Sexual Preference

Introduction to Issues of Race, Class and Sexual Preference

The explosive issues of race, class and sexual preference often come up in our day-to-day work with battered women. They are difficult to deal with because confronting these issues forces us to look at how we've been oppressed as well as how we oppress others. Many women, particularly white women, have never been taught to think or talk about our lives from a political perspective; and though women of color and many white working class women are taught early in life that the system works against them because of their race or class, they also have not seen their status as women as a political issue. What do "politics" have to do with battered women? Everything. Simply put, "politics" is dealing with power: who has it, who doesn't, and why.

All forms of violence against women thrive because we live in a world where white men have power ("the possession of control, authority or influence over others; the ability to act or produce an effect"). There are many groups of people who gain benefits from their positions (economic, social, cultural, religious), whether they use those consciously and intentionally or not. These benefits constitute privilege and are denied to those who don't fit into the powerful and/or privileged groups. Men have privilege to greater and lesser degrees depending on color, class and/or cultural background; heterosexual people have privilege; white people have privilege; middle and upper class people have privilege; people with no physical difficulties ("disabilities") have privilege.

Men of any class or race have power and privileges in their relationships to individual women; i.e., the societal sanction to beat women, the right to coerce or force women to have sex and the expectation that women will emotionally and physically take care of men. Some people have privilege with regard to one aspect of their lives and lack of privilege with regard to another. For example, a working class married woman has the privilege to talk openly about her family life and her relationship with her husband, whereas a middle class lesbian has more economic freedom, but not the privilege to discuss her life openly.

The institutionalized exertion by these groups of their power and privilege are called sexism, heterosexism, racism and classism. Battering of women by men exists in this context, in a system which is based on groups of people gaining and holding power at others' expense.

Because the battered women's movement is political and will effect social change, each of us working in our shelters and projects needs to take responsibility to learn about oppression, to confront our feelings about it and make a commitment to change. We are all limited by racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism and other forms of oppression. We are denied access to other cultures and to opportunity for growth. How can we be a safe place for all women if we don't look collectively and individually at the ways we are oppressed? We will grow from knowing about each other's experience without feeling guilty about who we are. The only way to effect change on a large scale is to start with ourselves and come to understand who we are as individuals and then to look at the whole system which allows and even sanctions battering and all forms of violence against women.

It is important to address these issues as they arise in our work, not because we want to stress differences, but because we each need to be able to understand and deal with women's experiences which differ from our own. If we don't have an understanding of these issues, they will continue to divide us and prevent us from joining together and building on the experiences that we as women have in common. We can build on our acknowledgement and acceptance of our differences and diversity along with our acknowledgement of our commonality.

Although we recognize that issues of race, class and sexual preference arise between battered women and the men who abuse them, that is not our focus here. The following section specifically concerns the issues of race, class and sexual preference and how these arise between women working and living in shelters.

—Jane Weiss

Class Differences

Although most Americans are convinced that this is a classless society, it is clear that there are distinct differences among its members which can only be explained in terms of class backgrounds, privileges and values. While we have our share of "exceptions to the rule," this is not a country of equal opportunity, however much we'd like it to be. If we look at class as an economic issue only, we can fairly easily define class categories and describe other people in terms of such categories.

However, there are differences in how class affects white people and how it affects people of color. For people of color, the fact of having color means being identified as 'different' than the norm. It means that regardless of one's job status, or income, one is always related to on the basis of one's skin color. This article primarily addresses the issues between white people of different classes, though we attempt to draw some connections between the experience of class and that of race.

The very few people (white men) who are in control of "the means of production"* make up the "upper" or "ruling" class, and actually have control of most of the wealth and power in our society. Those who work for the ruling class in non-menial, professional and management jobs are the middle class, also usually white men) who are generally well paid. While they do not have anywhere near the wealth and power of the ruling class, they enjoy a great deal of autonomy and control in their lives because of economic security. The working class, on the other hand, is made up of non-professionals. While a small number of working class people (mostly white men) have fairly well-paid "blue collar" jobs (as plumbers, electricians, etc.), most, especially women of all races and Third World men, have menial and low paid jobs, and sometimes can't get jobs at all. There are also low income people, those on welfare, social security or long term unemployed workers, whose economic means are even less than that of working class people. An out-of-proportion number of these people are Black, Latin, Native American and Asian; many are women, including white women. Since few of us ever deal or associate with members of the upper class, this perspective will primarily concern the differences between middle class, working class and low income people.

How Does Class Affect Us?

Class is defined in Webster's dictionary as a group sharing the same economic or social status. This status is based on one's family position, usually defined by the father's status. The issue of class status is complicated for women, because we are usually defined according to the men in our lives (fathers, husbands, lovers). Therefore a woman who is raised in a working class family may be labelled "middle class" because she is married to a middle class man. Assumptions about her resources and privileges may be completely off base because of the false assumption that her class has been changed by her marriage. In fact, she may share very few of her husband's privileges, getting only that which he "gives" her, and he may be in exclusive control of their resources and finances. We prefer, therefore, to look to a woman's background and the family in which she was raised to determine her class status, recognizing the general principle that women of any class status have fewer privileges and resources than men of that same class.

With these things in mind we took time before writing to talk about our own family backgrounds, how they differed and how that affected the kind of adults we became. As women raised in particular class positions (and in different racial and cultural groups), we carry with us certain behaviors, assumptions, attitudes and experiences that influence the way we think about ourselves and others, the way we confront and try to work out our problems, and the way we feel about our work and our futures. Some of the major differences we discussed had little to do with money and more with expectations and privileges (some of which resulted from having or not having money).

from photo in *What Have Women Done?*

For instance, a working class woman in our group discussed how limited her perceptions of her future were when she applied to college during her last year of high school. Rather than apply for scholarships at private schools she assumed that she wouldn't be able to go to one of them and instead applied to local state colleges knowing that she could work part-time while living at home with her family. One of the middle class women in our group spoke of choosing to go to a state college (away from home), because she didn't want to deal with the "snobs" who go to private school. She recognized and treated the choice as hers, whereas the working class woman assumed that she had no other options.

Similarly, working class people generally do not have the privilege of traveling—except when required by their jobs. As a result of this and economic limitations, many working class people tend to stay in the same community or neighborhood for years, while middle class people enjoy the privilege of choosing to leave a community temporarily or permanently, without feeling the insecurity or displacement from which a working class person would suffer. Women, again, are sometimes an exception to the rule. Working class women who might otherwise choose to remain in the community in which they grew up are usually expected when they marry to live where their men choose, even if it means having to leave their community behind.

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*"*means of production" refers generally to businesses, factories, and other institutions producing goods and services, and specifically to the tools, machinery, equipment and other items necessary to produce goods.*

Middle class women are expected to do likewise, but may feel less displaced by such a move because of their backgrounds and expectations about mobility. People of color are often limited in mobility not just in terms of economics or feelings of displacement, but because of color: whether or not they would be safe in a predominantly white community, whether they would be isolated by racism in a community in which they might live or travel. This affects people of color regardless of economic status.

Middle class people, particularly if they are white, generally enjoy greater mobility both emotionally and physically than working class people. Many assume from a fairly young age that they will be able to choose where they want to live and work. They may have access to connections to assist them in job hunting, school entrance and housing. Working class people, on the other hand, are usually so restricted by finances and opportunities that they assume that they will live where they can afford to, work where they can find jobs, and travel very little—if at all. Working class people of color have the additional limitations of racial discrimination at work, at home, at school, and while traveling.

People's perception of themselves and their sense of self worth are also affected by their class and race. For instance, many low income mothers are barraged with a degrading self image by the media, social services workers with whom they come in contact, and others because of their need for welfare. Many working class women, of all races, feel they need to keep up with an image of what they ought to be, through clothes, material goods, etc. Their middle-class counterparts may feel less of a need for this because their privilege gives them a sense of security and greater social acceptance.

The importance of survival versus striving for ideals in one's life is also affected by class background. Working class people, especially people of color, may feel a much stronger need for secure jobs, stable income and other survival necessities, than middle class people who have always gotten by and therefore expect to continue to get by comfortably. On the other hand, middle class women, used to security, may feel more fearful of leaving violent men because of losing their economic stability. Low income women, especially those on welfare, spend most of their time surviving on extremely limited resources, which often creates great self reliance. This means that each woman's class background affects how she feels about social change possibilities for her own life and her access to her ideals.

These descriptions are generalizations, of course, and each of us at any given time may behave in ways that seem to ignore our class backgrounds. For instance, some middle class white women choose to work for little pay and live in working class neighborhoods at less expensive rents in order to reject their class backgrounds, and do political work. While they might take on some of the outward characteristics of working class women, they cannot shed or change their own background by making less money and spending time with working class neighbors and co-workers. The decision is a choice for middle class women and therefore they still have the privileges and options of their class, both the concrete ones, such as continuing access to money when needed, and the subtle ones, such as the feeling of being in control of circumstances rather than the reverse. Similarly, a working class woman, especially a woman of color, who has worked her way to a professional job by going to college on scholarships, loans and work, doesn't leave her experiences, traditions, or values behind her. It will still be a struggle for her to feel more in control and less subject to her circumstances. Even as we attempt to reject our class backgrounds, its imprint and importance colors our actions and decisions.

While a person's class does not change by virtue of her marriage or education, privileges and economic security may increase or decrease at different times in a woman's life in relation to marriage, education and employment. For instance, a middle class woman often is assumed to enjoy all of the economic and social privileges of her class. This assumption continues even after many of these have been stripped away when she has left the man upon whom she was economically dependent.

Although it is difficult to make generalizations about women and class, because women have been kept on the periphery of the economic system, there are class differences that we must face each day in working with battered women and their children.

Class Differences In Battered Women's Programs

Conflicts arising from class backgrounds, privileges and expectations sometimes occur between staff members, between staff and battered women, and between battered women using our programs. As women committed to working toward a violence-free, unoppressive society, we all have a responsibility to fight classism and other forms of domination in ourselves and others. It is particularly important for those of us who have the privileges and power of the middle class to deal with our attitudes and prejudices about class differences. Those of us who gain from society's class structure can easily perpetuate it by refusing to recognize our privileges. Most of us were brought up on the American dream: anyone who works long and hard enough will become a success. People with privileges and power (i.e., white men) choose to keep this myth alive because it prevents them from feeling guilty about their privileges, and encourages working class people and people of color to look to themselves rather than a capitalist society for the reason that they don't have the same privileges and possessions. Being aware of and sensitive to class differences and middle class privileges can be the first step in working on this issue; however, we need to act based on this knowledge to prevent classism in our groups by staff and women using the programs.

It may be helpful to consider some examples of classism and how to deal with it as a staffer. Some middle class staffers make insensitive and hurtful remarks to less privileged women using our programs. A middle class woman might not understand how a working class battered woman might see relocating within or outside of the state as impossible. She may not appreciate how financially difficult or even impossible it would be, how scary it might be for someone who has done little or no traveling, or how uprooted the woman would feel without her own support network. Another example of a classist and insensitive remark is a staffer telling a battered woman that she should just hire herself a good lawyer. The blatant disregard for the woman's financial limitations is obvious, but the more subtle disregard for her experiential limitations is just as harmful. Women with economic privilege and professional connections should think before trying to support a working class woman by counseling her to do something that is beyond her means. Telling a working class woman that it's better to buy "good" (expensive) clothes and shoes for her children because they last longer, or that she should dress better when she goes to court (she may not own "good" clothes) can be very classist, in that it disregards a woman's economic ability and judges her according to middle class standards.

Staffers talking about month-long vacations, long distance trips, etc., can also be alienating for working class women, especially if they are coming out of violent and restrictive relationships. In the same way, values about food, such as vegetarianism, or about lifestyle, such as collective living, can also be alienating to working class and low income women, who may perceive suggestions of food or lifestyle as judgmental. (Vegetables are expensive and vegetarian diets are non-traditional in this society; many working-class women have never lived outside a nuclear family, never lived in college dormitories or other group households, and therefore collective living is quite foreign.) While it's useful for women in our programs to hear about different lifestyles, options and ways of thinking, it's important that staff be careful not to talk about such things in a judgmental or hurtful way.

While many women seeking help from battered women's groups are working class, middle class women also turn to us for support and refuge because their privileges have been severely limited by the abusive men they have left. Most middle class women using our groups, upon leaving their abusers, have lost access to the money and resources which were controlled by their husbands, and many are scared to death of their sudden insecurity. Although they may have other resources not available to working class women, it will take time for them to recognize this. Especially in a shelter, conflicts often arise between middle class and working class residents, and can escalate into full-scale battles. By watching for conflicts and making women deal with them right away, we can begin to prevent conflicts from escalating into such painful and oppressive incidents. Class issues in shelters, like cultural and racial issues, often arise in the context of food, childrearing and housekeeping, all of which require women's cooperation in a shelter.

Most of us clean our houses, cook our meals and raise our children remarkably like our mothers did; and you can't tell a woman that her mother was dead wrong about all that. Since we probably can agree that there is no perfect way to do any of these things, the most we can hope to do is to share our different experiences and learn from each other. Two women arguing about whether dinner should be meat or beans, fish or casserole, can get involved in a shouting match about what is better.

A similar battle can arise when a middle class woman tries to impose her standards on a working class woman. For instance, she might suggest buying juice for the children rather than Kool-ade, or health bread instead of Wonder Bread. The working class mother in this situation can feel defensive about what she's been giving her kids, and even resentful toward the other woman who can afford to buy more expensive food. Clearly it is more often the high price that discourages working class women from buying juice rather than ignorance about nutrition or lack of concern. If the middle class woman recognized this, she would be less likely to make such suggestions or at least wouldn't raise them as criticisms of the other mother. If a situation like this turns into an argument, a staffer should interrupt the argument and try to get the women to talk and to listen to each other. Because of the emotional nature of the argument, they might need an objective person to help them work it out. The staffer can try to get each woman to tell her side of the story, and to listen to the other woman without interrupting. Each should explain what she felt. Once they've listened to each other, it may be easier for them to get past "my way is better than yours" and closer to "why I feel the way I do about this." Talking to each other about why they do things differently and sharing experiences could bring the women closer together and they might learn about dealing with conflicts and differences and about appreciating the experiences of other women.

Aside from having to interrupt arguments we should be encouraging women who use our programs to reach out to women of all class backgrounds, to share their differing experiences as well as their common ones. As women, most of us were raised to think of others first; thus it shouldn't be so difficult for us to be open to each other and understanding of differences. We have a great deal to learn from each other.

There are no easy or short-term solutions to classism; the issue is a difficult one to recognize and address. By becoming more sensitive to and aware of class differences, however, we may begin to appreciate the positive exchanges that can occur. Sharing our experiences, we can enrich each others' lives and make things better for our children. We live in a society which encourages divisions of all kinds—class, racial, cultural and sexual. Challenging such divisiveness is part of our work toward ending woman abuse. We must be committed to changing not only our outward behavior and language, but also our inward feelings and value judgments. We can help each other do this, and become stronger and closer as we learn from each other.

—Chris Butler, with help from
Mary Quinn, Renae Scott and Gail Sullivan

Racism Awareness For White Women

This section on racism* is directed primarily to white women because it is we white women who need to learn more about racism and need to confront it in our lives. Much of the section is written by white women to white women, with some help from Black women. The articles which follow, however, reflect both Black and white women's perceptions.

Definitions

The following are some brief definitions** which we hope will help in understanding the issue.

Prejudice: *is an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand without knowledge, thought or reason.*

Racism: *is any attitude, action or inaction which subordinates a person or group because of her/his color. Racism is based on the ability to exercise power: power + prejudice = racism. Racism can be either individual or societal.*

Individual Racism: *is any negative action or attitude of individual white people against individuals or groups of people of color. For example, a white person on a bus stands rather than sitting next to a black person; a white person presumes that a Latina woman is not very intelligent because she doesn't speak English very well.*

Societal Racism: *includes institutions (church, government, courts, business world, social service system, media, etc.) taking action (or not taking action) or perpetuating attitudes which deny power, access or privilege to people of color. For example, a college prejudging that all Black women students are automatically "high risk" students academically regardless of grades and college board scores presumes that Black women are intellectually inferior. This is a racist attitude. The high rate of infant mortality among Black and Native American people is the result of racism by inaction.*

Ethnocentrism: *is a tendency to view other cultures as alien and inferior. For example, other cultures are often viewed by us as "primitive." The flip side of this is objectification and rip-off of other cultures. For example, in the 60's, many young white people began imitating Native Americans by wearing Indian clothing, beaded headbands and picking up bits of Indian spirituality. Currently because of Bo Derek, many white women have begun cornrowing their hair, wearing long braids with beads in them, yet don't realize that those styles are from African cultures, not from Hollywood.*

Imperialism: *is racism on a global scale. It is one nation controlling another's political, economic and cultural institutions. The dominating nations are usually white and more developed economically, while the dominated nations are non-industrialized and/or economically underdeveloped and often denied their cultural and political autonomy. For example, the U.S. government continues to take Native American lands to extract coal, uranium and other resources; Native American people are denied control, suffer terrible health hazards such as miscarriages and birth defects, and are often forced to move to cities where they lose their cultural identity and can't get jobs. U.S. corporations export infant formula to African nations because women here aren't using it. The corporations make a huge profit by convincing African women it's better than breastfeeding, yet their babies die because of its use (due to poor sanitation, need to water it down to be able to afford it, etc.).*

Why White Women Need To Deal With Racism

Racism is the problem of white people. We live in a society in which people are oppressed because of their race, class and/or culture. Because white people are the dominant group and institutions such as government and the media are controlled by white people (mostly men), we are socialized to hold racist ideas. Whether we choose to or not, white people carry negative attitudes and stereotypes toward people of color: Black, Native American, Asian and Latin people. For instance, white people often presume that Black, Native American and Latin people are less intelligent than white people, or are less motivated to 'succeed.' Some people refer to IQ tests as proof of this racist assumption and there are books and academic papers written to back it up. Yet the fact is that IQ tests have been proven to be culturally biased in favor of white middle class people and that there is a range of intelligence represented in every race and cultural group. Racism results in "smart" people of color being considered exceptions to their race. One of the most offensive racist assumptions is that white women should feel afraid of being raped by Black men; the fact is that 93% of all sexual assaults happen between people of the same race. Racist attitudes such as these can and should be changed.

White people, because the society is controlled by other white people, automatically get certain benefits from being white. We get these benefits whether we are conscious of it or not. These benefits are denied to people of color just as automatically. White people have greater economic opportunity, acceptance, access to institutions, validation and safety. For example, a white woman and a Puerto Rican woman (both staffers) go to welfare together and the worker assumes that the white woman knows more than the Puerto Rican woman, who gets left out of the conversation. The white woman in this

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It should be noted that anti-semitism, which is the oppression and/or hatred of Semitic (usually Jewish) people, is a separate but related issue. However, like every prejudice and/or oppression, it has its own unique characteristics and should be discussed in and of itself. We have not found nor developed a section of the training manual to deal with anti-semitism, but hope to in the future.

***Thanks to Foundations for Change for ideas for some of these definitions.*

case is benefitting from her privilege, even though she's not the one creating the situation. People of color, on the other hand, are made to feel constantly invisible by seeing white people in government, white people on TV, white people in authority positions, white faces on the covers of books, magazines, greeting cards, white people everywhere they look. Moreover, people of color, both men and women, have to be in constant fear for their lives and their psyches and must think carefully about where they can safely go because of the violence and cruelty directed against them by some white people.

Because of the attitudes with which we've been raised, and because of the privileges we get, intentional or not, we as white women need to see that racism is our problem and that we need to challenge it.

We have a lot to gain from actively challenging racism. Although we get relative privileges from racism, it has negative effects on us as well. Racism dehumanizes us: it cuts us off from our feelings because we don't want to experience the pain, guilt, fear and anger which it creates; it makes us hate, it prevents us from being able to really know others because we are restricted by our stereotypes and by living in a segregated society. It limits us: we are denied access to the richness and beauty of other cultures, we are denied information about the lives and histories of people of color. For instance, we aren't taught about Rosa Parks, whose refusal to sit in the back of a bus helped catalyze the Civil Rights Movement; or about the Iroquois Confederacy on whose system of government our Constitution is based; and we probably didn't learn about Reconstruction after the Civil War, when white and Black farmworkers banded together to democratize their society and were attacked by the Ku Klux Klan, organized by the old aristocracy. (This is not to say that white cultures have no richness or beauty, a feeling people sometimes get as they confront racism, but that it is not the *only* culture worth knowing about.) On a societal level it costs us money and energy to maintain a racist system. For instance, by withholding productive jobs from people of color and pushing them into menial jobs or onto welfare in order to survive (along with poor white people), the society loses the value of their productive labor.

Racism prevents working class white people from working with people of color to get the goods and services and power we all need to run our lives. For instance, the Boston Jobs Coalition has been fighting for a "resident jobs policy" in construction of new buildings in Boston. This would enable more Black, Native American and Latino men (probably not women) to get jobs. However, the local unions (made up predominately of white men) are opposed to it because much of their membership is located outside the city, they're having a hard time getting work, and they perceive such a policy as an attempt to hurt the unions and deny them jobs. Because the unions have largely excluded minority workers, this situation then becomes a fight between white unionized workers vs. workers of various races who can't break into the white unions. Although both groups need jobs and have just grievances, racism has prevented them from working together, supporting each other, and jointly making the changes which would allow all to live and thrive.

Racism exists whether or not there are any people of color in your immediate workplace or community. Because racism is perpetuated by a white-controlled system, and all white people are socialized with racist attitudes, racism exists wherever *white* people are. Because it is in our interests to challenge it, racism must be dealt with regardless of the number of people of color in our organization or community. Furthermore, it is in the nature of racism to make people of color invisible as indicated in the following examples. People of color are often spoken of in the third person, "they..." even when they are present; communities are largely segregated (especially rural communities, which in the north are often all white) so that white people grow up thinking there are no Black (Native American, Asian, Latin) people in their community (even when there are); people of color often work in "invisible" jobs (as servants, laborers or migrant workers); people of color are usually outside of white churches, clubs and other social gatherings; and when they are professors or doctors, they are invisible because nobody knows they exist and/or they are seen as different than the rest of their race (i.e., not really colored).

It is particularly in the interest of white women to challenge racism. Racism, like sexism, was institutionalized by wealthy white men to serve *their* interests. Although white women get privileges from being white, in the long run a racist system serves the interests of maintaining white men's power and not white women who have little power. Racism is used to convince white women to identify themselves with white men even though white women, like women and men of color, would most benefit from changing the system that keeps rich white men in power. Furthermore, it is impossible to succeed in ending battering and rape, which hurt us all, unless women of all races work together to confront the institutions which perpetuate violence against women. Racism prevents us from working together as women, and white women, by virtue of our cultural heritage, inevitably perpetuate racism. Therefore, our success at ending violence against women depends upon confronting racism, within ourselves and our organizations.

White Women – Changing Ourselves

There is no one step or thing to do to eradicate our own racist attitudes, nor racism as a social system. We need information about other people's lives, cultures and histories; we need to learn how the system of racism works, why it exists, who it really benefits and how much. We need to recognize our own feelings about people of color and our oppressive attitudes. We need to acknowledge the privileges we gain from racism and the power dynamics which result between white people and people of color. Lastly, we need to understand how and why we'd benefit from challenging racism.

We all have a lot of feelings about racism: fear of confronting it, guilt about it, hopelessness about whether we can change it. In order to change ourselves, we need to move beyond these feelings which can paralyze us. This means perhaps for the first time, looking at how we feel about being white and developing a sense of self worth and pride in the positive aspects of our own backgrounds, while we learn and appreciate other people's backgrounds. Fear, guilt and hopelessness are destructive, useless and prevent us from changing.

We need to overcome our guilt and hopelessness by making a long term commitment to change ourselves: our attitudes and our behavior. It can be scary but also exhilarating. It will mean changes in the way we live, think and work, which can be threatening but can also be growing experiences. We need to be willing to change our organizations as well, so that we are not forcing women of color who want to work with battered women to do everything *our* way, mold themselves to *our* ideas. And we need to be willing to confront each other about racism.

Challenging Racism In Our Work

There will be instances of racism arising in all of our work and lives. We need to challenge racism without blaming someone or putting her/him down. Remember that she/he is not an awful person and deserves sensitivity. The following are some examples of situations which come up.

★ **There are Puerto Rican, Black and white women and their children in the shelter.** It's a Puerto Rican woman's turn to cook dinner. She cooks rice and beans; a white woman comes to you to say, "She cooked that last week; my kids won't eat *that* food; can't you get her to cook some *decent* food?" You could encourage her to eat the food being prepared and talk with her about the fact that each culture has its own food. Ask if she's ever eaten another culture's food. Remind her that food is an expression of culture and that she could learn from it; point out that the Latina woman and her children have to eat another culture's food the rest of the week. You might also remind her that her attitude is disrespectful and that she would not appreciate being treated in such a mean way.

★ **You're on the hotline with a white woman, referring her to a shelter.** She's been told that the shelter is for all women, of all races. You ask if that is okay. There's a hesitation before she answers alright. You know that she really needs shelter, yet she had also made a previous comment in the conversation which you had thought might be racist. You could say, "You seem to be hesitating; is it really okay for you? Have you had any other experiences with women of different races? What are your fears?"

★ **A white woman and a Black woman are angrily arguing about the ways that each disciplines her child.** The white woman says that the Black woman hits her kids, yells at them too much. The Black woman says the white woman doesn't discipline hers at all, that they do whatever they please and get away with it. This may not look overtly racist, but may be a way in which different cultures have placed different values on childrearing. (This is not to say that hitting or yelling are values of Black culture, but that greater discipline may be more valued by some Black women than white women.) You could remind them that there are reasons that each believes as she does and ask them to explain that to each other. They might learn from each other and see that because Black people have to deal with racism all their lives, Black and white adults need different kinds of strengths. Even more, Black children and adults often need to behave with far greater discipline than white children and adults; a white adolescent who steals a car may get arrested and charged, but a Black adolescent might well get killed for the same action. The women of both cultures are raising their children according to the qualities they see their children as needing in their lives.

★ **A white woman's children have called an Asian woman's children "chinks"; you overheard it.** You could get the mothers and children together to talk about why that language and behavior is unacceptable, from your point of view and from the organization's. Or, you could talk with the white mother and make sure that she talks with the children, offering to assist her if she wants support.

If it happens again, and the Asian woman comes and says that the white woman didn't take it seriously and that she makes racist remarks herself, you might ask to talk with the white woman privately, say it disturbs you that she doesn't take it seriously. Discuss the effect of racist comments on the Asian woman and her children, and why it bothers you. Get the white woman to talk about her feelings.

★ **There's a Chilean woman in the program who speaks very little English.** There's one Puerto Rican woman on staff who's the only staffer who speaks Spanish fluently. The rest of the staff don't try to talk with the Chilean woman when she's there, but assume that the Puerto Rican staffer is taking care of her; they leave notes for the Puerto Rican staffer about what she should tell the Chilean battered woman, etc. Finally the Puerto Rican staffer blows up because she feels overburdened, overwhelmed and unsupported. What could you have done? You (the rest of the staff) could have made attempts to talk with the Chilean woman in English; those who know a little Spanish could have tried it out, even though they'd be embarrassed (a common experience for people learning English); and you should have checked with the staffer to see what support she felt she needed. Perhaps if she *had* to be the sole support of this woman, you could have taken over her other responsibilities.

Though challenging ourselves and each other is hard, we need to do it and do so in a supportive, caring way. It will help us all to grow. Be real and be supportive, but don't accept racism.

The following articles deal more in depth with some of the realities of racism. They raise issues for each of us to consider in terms of our individual actions and in terms of the actions and attitudes of our groups. They are written from three perspectives: Beverly Smith speaks of her experiences as a Black feminist in the women's movement. Renae Scott speaks of her experience as a Black woman in the shelter movement; and Ellen Pence speaks of beginning to understand connections between her experiences with sexism as a white woman and the experiences of Black women with racism.

—*Gail Sullivan*

Some Thoughts On Racism

Bonnie Acker

from photo in *Southern Exposure*

What I'd like to do in this article is to tell some of my thoughts on race and racism and some of the experiences I've had being who I am—a Black feminist, lesbian activist.

This article will be a sort of patchwork with separate pieces held together by a common thread. I've decided to write it this way both because it seems easier for me than writing a more conventionally organized essay and also because I want to begin to break away from these traditional forms.

* * *

I have the feeling that no one understands, that no one white understands our daily experiences. As I wrote the previous sentence I tried to think of an example. I didn't have to go any further back than this morning. On my way to work I passed an older woman on the street and when I looked at her she frowned. I assumed it was because I am Black. What's really important about this assumption is that it's *always* valid on some level. It's never far-fetched for Black people to assume that negative treatment by a white person is the result of racism. No one white understands what it means to have this a constant valid assumption in our lives.

* * *

I've wondered whether we're able to identify with white women's experiences because we see ourselves as women as well as Black, because we see white women as human like ourselves, women like ourselves, not "other," because we're raised to be "bicultural"—we *have* to be—because we've had contact with white women all of our lives.

It's impossible, I think to be a Black person in this country and not be deeply aware of white people. Part of our awareness is knowledge we need to survive. Very few Black people actually have no contact with whites and even those who have little contact are constantly bombarded with whiteness. There's lots of propaganda in this culture for the normality of, the rightness of whiteness, just as there's a lot of propaganda for the normality of heterosexuality.

White women, on the other hand, can grow up without every having seen or known a Black person until they're adults. This is what it can mean to be a member of the majority race in a racist country. Even if white women have had early relationships with Blacks, I wonder how authentic they were, how honest and free. I'm thinking of the classic stories some upper class white women tell of their families' Black servants. At the same time that most white children are learning to relate to other people, they are *not* relating to Black people. So white women who're trying to learn to relate to Black women are faced with a basic kind of task much after they have gone through other basic development. I'm not saying that women can't grow after a certain age. Of course I believe that is part of what it means for us to be feminists. But it's much harder. There are so many years of living pulling against it. It's hard because it requires the courage to make one's self vulnerable and also because there's almost no help out there. No guides because this is something the society does not want done. It goes totally against the grain.

* * *

As Black feminists we are constantly being asked to legitimate feminist activities by our participation. At a recent academic conference I was the only Third World woman among feminist panelists. I was the only woman whose talk *focused* on women of color. I am furious that white women think they've dealt with Black women and with racism by giving me the responsibility of speaking for and about Black women. It's overwhelming to me and it's tokenism. What I want white women to do is to *include* Black women and other Third World women explicitly, *by name* in their work whether it be on medical abuse, lesbian artists or quiltmaking. What I want is that white women include Black women in their psyches, minds, hearts, their political analyses and political work. My sense of where most white women are on this is that they allude to Third World women but they do not feel competent to do more than that. And sometimes it doesn't occur to them to do even that. White women who are serious about fighting racism must get to the place where not only do they mention Black women but are also able to respectfully talk about what our presence means.

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Somehow white women have got to recall what they *already* know about racism, about being racist. They *were* taught it and they've got to bring it up out of their memories and look at it and talk about it.

• • •

Another task that Black feminists are often asked to do by white feminists is to explain racism. Writing this article is like that. I feel that I've been explaining myself as a Black person and explaining racism all of my life. I sometimes get so angry and tired being surrounded by white women at workshops, meetings or parties who're looking to me for answers. Yet the context of feminism makes it seem worth trying again and writing feels more personally gratifying, not such a psychic drain.

Confronting racism is terrifying work. I've caught glimpses of how terrifying in my recent attempts to confront my own anti-Semitism. It requires constant commitment and deep and growing honesty.* It's got to be done if this movement is to survive.

—Beverly Smith

First appeared in ***Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women***
(see bibliography)

**Adrienne Rich has written two essays which are essential to this work.*

Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying, *(Motheroot Publications, Pittsburgh: 1977). $1.25 plus $.25 postage/handling. For single orders and information on bulk orders write to: Motheroot Publications, Ann Pride, 214 Dewey Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15218.*

'Disloyal to Civilization': Feminism, Racism and Gynephobia *which is to be published soon in the magazine* **Chrysalis**. *Their address is 635 S. Westlake Ave., Los Angeles, California 90057. $3.00 an issue, $12.00 yearly subscription.*

Racism: A White Issue

I've written and re-written this article only to find that because I am still only in the early stages of seriously examining my own racism and the racism in the battered women's movement, I am unable to articulate much of what I think needs to be said. I grew up in a home where my father believed and preached the natural superiority of whites. Because his racism was so blatant, it was easy for me to reject his ideas during the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Marching with Father Groppi for open housing in Milwaukee, sending my babysitting money to Martin Luther King and making sure that I always went to confession to the black priest in our lily-white parish were all signs to me that I had rejected the racist philosophy my father taught and had joined with the Third World people in their struggle for liberation.

As I began to get involved in neighborhood organizing and especially in the battered women's program, I watched Blacks and Indians accuse white feminist women of racism. Certainly, they didn't mean me—I had marched in Milwaukee. I too was oppressed by the white male. So when I heard women of color speaking of white privileges, I mentally inserted the word "male"; "white male privileges."

I viewed the anger of women of color toward my white sisters as a cop out. We are the most vulnerable to this anger, we listened and tried to adjust. It seemed to me that because it is much easier for them to confront us than the racist system or the men in their communities who give no support to their participation in women's issues, we are the most aggressively confronted.

I also defended the decision making process we used in developing grassroots organizations as totally open to all women. In response to complaints of exclusionary practices, special care is always taken to notify minority organizations and women of color of conferences, planning meetings, job openings and workshops.

Gradually, I began to realize the tremendous gap between my rhetoric about solidarity with third world women and my gut feelings.

I began talking to a Black friend of mine, Ella Gross, about how sick I was getting of the whole issue. Ella, in her normal blunt direct way, told me that I was sick of it because I didn't want to go past adjusting my behavior to recognizing my racism. In the many many hours I spent talking to Ella, I began to see how white women ignored the need to re-examine the traditional white rigid methods of decision making, priority setting and implementing decisions. Our way of including women of color was to send out notices. We never came to the business table as equals. Women of color join us on our terms.

I started seeing the similarities of how men have excluded the participation of women in their work through *Roberts Rules of Order,* encouraging us to set up sub-committees to discuss our problems but never seeing sexism as their problem. It became clear that in many ways I act the same way toward women of color, supporting them in dealing with their issues. Similar to liberal men's recognition of the oppression of women, I recognized the oppression of Third World people but never understood that I personally had anything to gain by the elimination of racism. While I fully understand how sexism dehumanizes men, it never crossed my mind that my racism must somehow dehumanize me.

As white women, we continually expect women of color to bring us to an understanding of our racism. White women rarely meet to collectively examine our attitudes, our actions and most importantly, our resistance to change. The oppression of men toward women is in so many ways parallel to the oppression of women of color. Asking a Black, Indian or Chicana woman to define racism for us or to lay the historical background of Third World people's experience in this country is what allows us to continue our resistance to change. The history of racism in this country is white history, we know it, it is the story of our parents, grandparents and ourselves. Why do we call upon those who have suffered the injustice of that history to explain it to us?

Knowing that we grew up in a society permeated with the belief that white values, culture, and life-style is superior, we can assume that regardless of our rejection of the concept we still act out of that socialization. The same anger and frustrations that as women we have in dealing with men whose sexism is subtle, not blatant, is the frustration and anger women of color must feel toward us. The same helpless feeling we have in trying to expose that subtle sexism must be the feelings of women of color in working with us. I have sat through hundreds of meetings with men, constantly raising issues about women's involvement or the effects of decisions on women, and felt totally frustrated knowing that to them I'm being petty, my issues are relatively unimportant to the business at hand, my comments resented. I always end up either feeing crazy or absolutely enraged thinking that they are deliberately acting dumb. I'm now beginning to realize that in many cases men do not understand because they have never committed themselves to understanding and by understanding, choose to share their power. The lessons we've learned so well as women must be the basis for our understanding of ourselves as oppressive to the Third World women we work with.

We must acknowledge what we think we have to lose by this understanding and find what we have to gain by eliminating our racism. We must believe that racism causes us to be less human and work toward humanizing ourselves.

It seems that much of our resistance to change comes from being angry at women of color. There are many times that white women are put in a real kind so that no matter what we do we are accused of being racist. There are times when racism is inappropriately used as an issue when the disagreements are clearly philosophical. But those, often very legitimate, resentments we have cannot become a justification for perpetuating our racism. The confusion we feel about when and how this movement is racist will not be cleared up until we understand racism as our issue and our responsibility and begin addressing it among ourselves rather than depending totally on Third World women to raise and clarify the issue for us.

—Ellen Pence
first appeared in ***Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women***

Race And The Shelter Movement

In our struggle to open shelters, to stay open and to provide safety for battered women, we constantly make choices that determine the priorities of our projects. There is always one more thing to do—a meeting, a crisis, a class to help us learn how to run the shelter more effectively, and a wide variety of issues with which to deal.

In some shelters, people feel there is no need to deal with race, race issues or racism. As a Third World woman I feel this is a mistake. Even if there are apparently no visible Third World women in your community, that is no excuse. Often Third World women are part of white women's experience but work in invisible jobs such as factories, laundries, as houseworkers and babysitters.

Has adequate outreach been done to alert Third World women to your shelter? Has your staff been sensitized around race issues and language barriers? Racism takes various forms. It could involve out and out remarks about different kinds of food, values and communities, or more subtle ones. And both are devastating to the woman on the receiving end. Racism can and does affect the running of shelters. For example, when you define and develop what you consider to be the most necessary services to meet a battered woman's most basic needs, do you consider some bilingual staff members to be a basic necessity? Do non-English speaking women know about your shelter and can they get the same information and support once they come, as English speaking women?

In our shelter, our biggest discussions have been around how different cultures view discipline. Some women would rather talk out discipline problems, discuss, talk it out with their children. Other women feel spankings are the only way to discipline. Compound this problem with white and Black women in a shelter on different sides of the issue—and you've got a Big Problem, because they all have to live there in the house with the differences.

The next biggest issue has been around food. Who cooks with grease (shortening, lard, etc.)? Who doesn't and why? Do we have to have beans again? Or, that food looks, tastes funny—without ever eating it or tasting it.

Women often spoil their kids—never allowing them or themselves to experience other people's food, culture, etc. Music—what radio station is listened to in the shelter? Is it soft rock, semi-classical? Is *Soul*, Black Music, really that *loud?*

Do the surroundings—pictures, books, magazines, etc., reflect other women's experiences? Do books reflect multi-racial children—just as you would have them be non-sexist? I'm sure you would look for non-sexist books—look for non-racist books in the process as well.

Have groups come in to do training around Race? Deal with it now before you have to—before it becomes a problem in your shelter. There are ways you can expose your shelter community to the issues of Race and Racism. Encourage women to meet with and talk to Third World women. Learn about Third World women's lives through literature. Black women have always known about white women's lives. What do you know and how do you feel about Third World women?

In urban areas our battle is constant—never being able to put it lower on the priority scale. You may think, isn't life for a battered woman overwhelming enough, leaving the battering situation? Do we have to put that on her head too? I think *yes*. We in the shelters are about *change*—changing each woman's life—and the world she will be in after leaving the shelter will be different also. She may work outside the home for the first time in her life, and Third World women may work in the same workplace. It's a start to learn about other people's lives, and at some point women realize there is a commonality in their lives, i.e., leaving the battering situations, and support can be gotten from that alone.

It is important to understand Racism and its effects as you understand the sexist way in which we as women grow up. It is also important to understand the benefits and reinforcement the society as a whole receives from Racism, and how it affects us. It divides us as women and the guilt immobilizes us so that we cannot cross the line. Women—cross over the barrier—Dare to be different!!

—Renae Scott

originally appeared in ***Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women***

Homophobia And Heterosexism

Definitions

Homophobia: *The irrational fear of homosexuality, both in oneself and in others; the fear of lesbians and gay men.*

Heterosexism: *The system of oppression of lesbians and gay men.*

Heterosexual privilege: *The benefits that a heterosexual person has automatically and that are denied lesbians and gay men.*

Lesbians: *Women-identified women. Most lesbians have their primary emotional, social and sexual needs met with other women. Some lesbians have a political ideology that is critical of male supremacy and the institutions that support it.*

Why We Need To Talk About It

It's important to talk about homophobia, heterosexism and lesbianism for a number of reasons. First, we must examine the fact that women's sexuality in general is defined and controlled by men. Women in abusive situations are often accused of being nymphomaniacs (wanting sex with any and all men) or lesbians (not want sex with *him*). In either case, the interpretation and naming of the woman's behavior is used to control her and leaves her further disempowered to define her own identity.

Second, as women begin to join together to claim our power and rights as women, the system that relies on the oppression of women for it's power will begin to use "lesbian-baiting"(homophobic accusations) to try and maintain its privileges and benefits. The fear of being labelled "lesbian" can be used to stop us from uniting with other women to speak up and take action against something we think is wrong. If we look at the fear of lesbians on a deeper level, we see that the threat comes not so much from the fact of women being sexual with each other, but from women forming deep, unbreakable bonds with each other.

Third, we need to be open to dealing with lesbianism as an option for the women who use our services. We must recognize it as a valid choice for women as they redefine their lives. Finally, for many years, lesbian women have been leaders in the women's movement, and particularly in the battered women's movement. The fact that we cannot openly acknowledge and appreciate this commitment, is injurious, not only to lesbians and the energy they have to give, but to every woman who hopes to have the power to define her own life.*

**See included article, "The Politics of Supporting Lesbianism" by Gloria Steinem.*

Why We Have Labels And Definitions

It often seems that lesbians are the ones pushing for women to define themselves by their sexuality or sexual preference. On a superficial level, we could ask, "Why should it matter who we sleep with?" or "Why not leave that aspect of our personal lives out of our work?" It is true that it *shouldn't* matter, but the reality of the situation in this society is that heterosexuality is defined as "normal" and everything else as "abnormal." Lesbians are oppressed by these definitions in most aspects of their lives. They are constantly faced with the dilemma of having to choose between being silent or lying about who they are, or "coming out" in situations that may be unsafe for them. Society's assumption that the only people who are visible and real are heterosexual, creates the need for lesbians to assert their visibility and reality as lesbians.

Furthermore, lesbian choice is not just a matter of sleeping with women. Lesbians have a culture that is unique, powerful and always in the process of discovery, change and creation. The mainstream culture, however, is deeply invested in the "rightness" of the heterosexual norm. As a result, battered women have had to remain silent to bolster the myth that marriage is bliss, while they internalize the blame and guilt for their abuse. Lesbians, on the other hand, are told collectively and individually that regardless of how they feel, they are actually very unhappy, constantly in turmoil and sick., As battered women need the space to work out their pain and anger, lesbians need the space to express their pride in who they are and to work out their thoughts and feelings as they attempt to deal with a society that would negate them.

How Homophobia And Heterosexism Work

Homophobia at its root is sexism and the hatred of women. The disgust and disbelief that people feel and express about lesbians can be traced back to our sexist conditioning. We are all told, explicitly and implicitly, that women are: stupid, devious, disgusting and unworthy of love except as sexual objects (why else would we need so much perfume, make-up, dieting and surgery to make us more pleasing?). No wonder we have a hard time imagining two women loving each other and choosing to be together. Even the hatred of gay men can be traced to the hatred of women: gay men are disdained because they are seen as giving up their superior position as men in order to become more like women.

Homophobia and heterosexism are oppressive to lesbians and gay men; however, they are also hurtful to heterosexual people. First, homophobia keeps us all locked into sex roles. Girls and women who are assertive, athletic and smart can be accused of not being "real women," in other words, they must be lesbians. Boys and men who are emotional and less aggressive than average can be labelled "fags." We are taught to stop being who we are or to hide who we are out of a fear that we will be labelled as deviants. Second, homophobia demands that women get all their physical and emotional needs met by men (the "natural" way, with the opposite sex). Women are pushed to compete with each other in order to get these needs met. Third, every woman, no doubt, can remember a time when a woman friend backed away from her or she backed away from her friend out of fear of the feelings they had and the labels those feelings carry. This is homophobia.

Homophobia is also used to prevent women from identifying themselves as feminists. Often women's image of a feminist is that of a lesbian who believes in feminism. This prevents heterosexual women from allying with other women to fight for their rights. Many heterosexual women of color see feminism as being only for white lesbians, and therefore not related to their lives at all; or they fear the anger they may face in their own communities for associating with white lesbians. This negates the existence of Black, Latin, Asian and Native American lesbians who face isolation in their own communities for their sexual preference and racism among white women who support their feminism and/or lesbianism. This homophobia, together with racism and classism, prevents women from uniting to work for our common interests.

Heterosexism is systematic homophobia. Heterosexism is pervasive in our lives, but is often hard to pinpoint because it is so ingrained and accepted. The following are explanations of how heterosexism affects various aspects of our lives.

Legal: Few states have laws protecting lesbians and gay men from discrimination. The fact that a woman is a lesbian will have a detrimental effect on any case in which she is involved, such as child custody, rape, battering, any arrest, etc.

Employment: Most lesbians are not "out" on the job for fear of ostracism or loss of the job (especially in jobs working with children). The fear of blackmail is constant for lesbians in public office or in positions of power.

Public Attitudes: TV, books, magazines, movies, jokes, stories are riddled with oppressive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Heterosexist comments about "fags" and "dykes" are accepted and laughed at by almost everyone, including people who would interrupt any other oppressive comments and attitudes.

Psychiatry and Medicine: Until recently, homosexuality has been diagnosed as an illness by the psychiatric profession. Although the "official" line has changed, many doctors still treat homosexuality as an illness. If a lesbian goes for a medical check-up, she will be asked what sort of birth control she uses and will be encouraged to try different methods because the assumption is that all women are heterosexual. Doctors and clinics rarely have information and treatments specific to a lesbian. She often is made to feel unwanted or that her real problem is her lesbianism, not her actual illness.

Religion: The bible and other "holy" books contain a few passages that can be interpreted as disallowing homosexuality. Homophobic people latch onto these passages, ignoring other indicators that would contradict their attitudes. Often, just the impressive sounding phrases "God's law" or "Laws of Nature" are used to give validity to otherwise unsound arguments about sexuality.

Family: Many lesbians find their relationships with their families to be one of the hardest things to deal with. Parents are most often invested in the "happiness" and "normalcy" of their child. They would like their daughter's adult life to reflect the values with which they have lived their lives. They would like for her to carry on the family traditions, which are most apparently heterosexual. The daughter's lesbianism could make them think they have been "bad parents." A lesbian might be openly rejected by her family and cut off from that source of support and stability. She might have to choose between not seeing them or being subjected to their fears about her "happiness," their embarrassment about what their friends or family members will think, their anger about her rebelliousness, their guilt and hurt about their parenting and their refusal to acknowledge her real life as well as other reactions and feelings.

Attack: The extreme of heterosexism is scapegoating, or the blame for society's ills being put on lesbians and gay men. Attack and even murder, have been and continue to be a result of this scapegoating. The campaign to "Save America's Children" has centered on lesbians and gay men as the cause of America's moral decay. It even goes so far as to blame the high number of California earthquakes on the fact that so many homosexuals live there. In Nazi Germany lesbians and gay men had to wear pink triangles on blue so that they could be identified. Thousands went to their deaths in concentration camps along with Jews, gypsies and leftists. Recently in Iran, homosexuals have been executed because they have been seen as representative of the decadence existing before the revolution.

Invisibility: There have been lesbians in every era of history, there are lesbians in every country in the world, and almost everyone has a lesbian friend, acquaintance or family member whether they know it or not. It is estimated that at least one out of every ten women is a lesbian, yet the fears and myths about "those women" persist. Stereotyping and misconceptions contribute to the invisibility of lesbians. Lesbians are not all muscular "bull dyke" taxi cab drivers, or white, young, middle class radical feminists. Lesbians are women of all ages, races, classes and cultural backgrounds, professions, etc. A woman of color who is a lesbian is often even more invisible because of the triple burden of being oppressed for her color, her sex and her sexual preference.

Homophobia In The Shelter/Service Group

The subject of lesbianism might become a very hot issue, especially in a shelter. For many women, this experience marks the first time that they will be in a group living situation with all women. A woman might, for the first time, be openly expressing her anger toward men and hearing the same from other women. She could also be coming from a situation where her batterer accused her of being a lesbian or discouraged her from getting help from women's groups by calling them "a bunch of lesbians." In the shelter, she will see women taking power in their lives and will probably begin to feel close to some women. These experiences and feelings of fear and confusion might trigger the automatic homophobic responses that we all have been taught. A woman could feel the need to project her feelings on to other residents or staff in the shelter. A woman or a group of women could, by words and action, alienate another woman who is, or is thought to be, a lesbian. A constant topic of discussion might become trying to figure out who on the staff is a lesbian.

Homophobic comments are sometimes used in the context of women giving support to each other. One woman could assure another that she shouldn't worry, that just because she left her husband doesn't mean that she's a lesbian. Another example is of a battered woman hugging a staffer, then pulling away saying with nervous laughter, "People will think we're a couple of lesbians."

Whether the incidents and attitudes come out of fear, confusion or lack of information, they can be disruptive and make it very difficult to maintain a sense of unity and safety for all women.

It is important that there be on-going internal discussions and workshops on the subjects of homophobia and lesbianism before a blow-up or crisis develops. It is also important to interrupt the remarks as they happen. When interrupting comments, the most important thing is to get the woman to talk about what she sees as the meaning behind the words she is using. Because sex and sexuality are taboo subjects anyway, it is often hard for women to be comfortable enough to talk about their attitudes. When someone is trying to deal with her negative feelings (such as anger, hurt, fear) about someone else by using words like "fag" or "lezzie" as insults, the first thing that she needs to do is to be able to express her feelings more directly without using those words. After the feelings have subsided, information to contradict the myths and stereotypes can be provided.

Because it is so hurtful for a lesbian to have to hear unconscious comments that label her as "sick," "evil," or "disgusting," she should not be put in the position of always being the one to say something about the homophobia. Part of every staffer's responsiblity is to make a safe space for all women, and to interrupt attitudes that could be harmful to any woman.

It is not necessary for either lesbian or non-lesbian women to reveal their sexual identities in the situations that require some information about lesbianism. In fact, it might be a good consciousness-raising experience for a heterosexual woman to *not* qualify her remarks with an "I'm straight, but . . . "introduction. In this situation, where she might be labelled a lesbian, she will be able to feel some of the fear and anxiety that lesbians face every day.

When a woman first arrives, it is important that you tell her that this is (or tries to be) a safe, supportive place for *all* women of different races and cultures, including lesbians on staff and using the services.

Children And Homophobia

Children can reflect homophobic attitudes by calling each other or other people "fag" or "queer." Childcare workers can strategize about how to talk with kids about homosexuality and homophobia in a way they can understand. An information session could be planned that would include examples of how people are different and what that means.

If a mother is concerned about her children being "exposed" to lesbians and gay male childcare workers, there are usually some myths that are causing her fears. One common one is that lesbians and gay men molest children. The reality is that over 90% of the molestation of children is done to young girls by heterosexual males. It is a sad fact that children run the highest risk of molestation in their own homes. Another myth is that children will be influenced to grow up to be homosexual if they are around lesbians and gay men. First, a woman might need to talk about her fears if that really did happen. Second, it's important to point out that no one really knows what "causes" homosexuality or heterosexuality. Most lesbians and gay men grew up exposed to exclusively heterosexual life styles, yet somehow managed to find the way that they needed to be in their lives.

Homophobia In The Community

The fact that our organizations are based on the principle of women helping women and that we help women escape from violent men makes our organization a likely target for homophobia. While doing community outreach, public speaking, meeting with local officials or representatives from other agencies, we could run up against attitudes and comments that need to be challenged or confronted. It is harder, however, to deal with rumors and indirect comments.

Some common homophobic comments are: "Oh, that group is just a bunch of lesbians," or, "the lesbians at that place molest the women that come to them for help." These comments produce anxiety in us because women we want to reach might be afraid to come to us; our community might not support us; and our funding could be jeopardized. The most important thing in dealing with these fears is to be prepared and not to run scared by trying to prove that there aren't any lesbians in the staff, or by reacting personally to the accusations.

Homophobia has very little relation to the quality of work we do with battered women. People who are "lesbian-baiting" are not really interested in the services we provide. They are reacting out of a fear of seeing women take power together or are enjoying the products of some voyeuristic fantasy about lesbians and sexuality. In either case, it is important to maintain the attitude that homophobia is the problem, not homosexuality. Confront people's worst fears about lesbians. Have they ever actually known of a woman being molested by a lesbian? Give people the information that you have about homophobia with an attitude similar to the one you have in explaining violence against women. Once again, lesbians should not be blamed for or expected to deal with the oppressive attitudes. If homophobia can scare our organizations out of supporting lesbians or taking a stand on an issue, then it has done what it was created to do.

—*M. Smith*

The Politics Of Supporting Lesbianism

The following are excerpts from an article by Gloria Steinem. *

Why is lesbianism a central issue for all feminists? To put the question a different way, since the-personal-is-political, why do I, as a "straight" feminist, feel so strongly that I have a personal interest in supporting lesbianism as a valid lifestyle?

Those are the questions I've been asked to answer here. I want very much to say to heterosexual feminists that we have clear and self-interested reasons for supporting and defending lesbianism. I want to say to lesbians that there are so-called straight feminists who understand this common cause and can be trusted.

I'm not suggesting that these events (in which people assumed that Steinem was a lesbian) are equal to the punishments suffered by women who are lesbians. As Charlotte Bunch has pointed out, women can only begin to guess at those penalties by living as a lesbian for a while. "Announce to everyone—family, roommate, on the job, everywhere you go," Bunch suggests to heterosexual feminists, "that you are a lesbian. Imagine your life, economically and emotionally with women instead of men. For a whole week, experience life as if you were a lesbian, and you will learn quickly what heterosexual privileges and assumptions are . . . and that self-loving women are a challenge to the idea that men are superior, an idea that social institutions strengthen and enshrine."

Furthermore, to say that lesbian and heterosexual feminists could or should share exactly the same experience and viewpoint would be to limit the full range of insights, and therefore the complete human knowledge, that feminism hopes to set free. As Bunch wisely pointed out, "True unity is grounded not on a false notion of sameness, but on understanding and utilizing diversity to gain the greatest possible scope and power."

The lesson of my experience—and that of other women who have acted on their belief in feminism, whether they also have a husband and children or not—is simply that sooner or later, all nonconforming women are likely to be labeled lesbians. True, we start out with smaller punishments of being called "pushy" or "aggressive," "man-hating" or "unfeminine." But it is only a small step from those adjectives, whether bestowed by men or by other women, to the full-fledged epithet of "lesbian."

Prefeminism, I would have been hurt by that word. I might have denied it explicitly, or modified my offending "unfeminine" behavior in order to deny it by word or by deed. And that's exactly what the accusers have in mind: to scare female human beings out of exercising all our human rights and talents, and thus to keep us from upsetting the male-superiority applecart.

It's for this reason that lesbians have often been pioneers at the forefront of change that has benefited women as a group, even when the lesbians involved were not acting for feminist reasons. Just by working and surviving as women without the protection of some status vis-a-vis a man, lesbians may force institutions into some acceptance of women on their own. And this pioneering act helps break a barrier for all autonomous women.

In a practical day to day sense, therefore, all feminists have a self-interest in taking the sting out of the word "lesbian," and making it as honorable a life-style as any other. Until we do, we ourselves will continue to be limited by fear of losing our jobs and career possibilities (not to mention housing, child custody suits, credit, and access to public accommodations) because of this accusation; or at a minimum, of losing society's esteem and our friends' or family's approval. As long as we shrink back in fear from the word "lesbian," we are giving it the power to keep all women in line.

Acting together with other women and becoming self-identified, female-identified, is a very long and inevitable part of gaining the power to reach a humanistic society in which we can integrate female and male, black and white as individual, equally powerful human beings. It's true that we also protect our much needed pioneers when we protect lesbian-feminist sisters. By "pioneers," I don't mean that lesbians are somehow the only true feminists. Though the lesbian need to compensate for past suffering makes that assertion sometimes understandable, the truth is that positing lesbianism as a requisite for feminism depends on the acceptance of heterosexual sex as always an act of conquering by the man. It depends, in other words, on accepting a male definition. Yet we are all most likely to get radicalized on our own concerns. And the truth is that heterosexual feminists ourselves will remain male-identified and "man junkies" to some degree until we dare to kick the habit of identifying with, and being given our self image by, the patriarchy. That practice of female identification and autonomy, whether sexual or not, is exactly what much of society condemns as lesbian.

There will continue to be those who say to feminists, "Don't mention lesbianism. Never support the cause of male homosexuals. You will only damage your cause." But we must look at our longer term goals and our real self-interest. We must understand that what we are attempting is a revolution, not a public relations movement. As long as we fear the word "lesbian," we are curtailing our own strength and abandoning our sisters. As long as human sexuality is politically controlled, we will all be losing a basic human freedom.

By working together, we have our full selves and the future to gain.

—*Gloria Steinem*

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from photo by Ellen Shub

Chapter 6:

Women In Crisis: Mental Health, Drugs And Alcohol

Introduction To Mental Health, Alcohol and Drugs

In addition to the issues surrounding violence against women that we have dealt with so far, there are other related issues that we need some basic information about. The following articles cover a few of these: dealing with women in emotional crisis, women alcoholics, and women who are abusing drugs.

These issues are a part of our work because sometimes the emotional crisis or the abuse of alcohol or drugs is a result of the violence the woman has suffered. All of these issues come up in various degrees: any woman may face a temporary emotional crisis, some severe, some not; a woman might well have been prescribed drugs and be overly reliant on them while not being addicted; a woman might be overly reliant on alcohol to ease social situations or "help her cope," without being alcoholic. Therefore, while you hopefully won't be dealing with these issues in their more serious aspects often, it's important to have some information and skills and be able to deal with them sensitively as they come up.

These articles give bare bones information; it will usually be necessary in any of these situations to refer a woman to some sort of program appropriate to her circumstances.

Mental Health: Myths and Realities

Myth 1: Crazy women are totally different from the rest of us. They have some internal defect that makes them unable to cope with life's stresses.

Reality: The ability to cope with stress is a relative matter. We all react to situations in ways that are more or less "appropriate," "productive" and "successful," depending on how complex our problems are and how we feel threatened by them.

Although some people may need help more often, there are not two distinct groups of people, one "crazy" and one "sane." There is not even a linear continuum from crazy to sane. For each of us there are times in our lives when we are less or more able to take care of ourselves and to deal productively with our situations. And, though some of our reactions may not serve us well now, it is important to remember that they were chosen at some time for good and, on some level, sane reasons. Thus, we find ourselves to be complex webs of behaviors that serve us to varying degrees.

Life in this society is marked by stress: violence, cultural oppression, frustration in dealing with systems which were not designed to meet human needs. These stresses cause women to be afraid, angry, and self-hating. The intensity of each woman's response is related to the intensity of the abuses that have accumulated in her life. All of our responses are colored by our personal histories and we all experience "crazy" responses in certain times and to certain parts of our lives.

We all learn to distance ourselves from intense pain in whatever ways we can, and thus our crazy behaviors are almost always responses of self-protection against abuse. People labelled "schizophrenic," for example, often use mazes of words to keep themselves distant and therefore less vulnerable. All of us develop patterns and defenses to protect ourselves; we develop these as functional and logical responses to bad situations. Sometimes these patterns grow to cause more problems than they solve, or they may help to perpetuate a problem rather than resolve it.

* * *

Myth 2: Crazy women are fragile and any direct, honest feedback or limit-setting you can give them will upset them intensely.

Reality: Women labelled "crazy" are no more fragile than anyone else. They might find direct, honest feedback and limit-setting to be painful, but rarely is it destructive. In fact, such honesty is an indication of care as well as a call for change.

Usually, a woman in distress has been deceived repeatedly by family, friends, institutions and other systems. She will perceive certain attitudes of other people, and then these people will disown their feelings. A woman responds to this repeated deception by becoming mistrustful. Therefore, to build a relationship built on trust, the people around her must be honest about their thoughts and feelings concerning her. Unspoken boredom or annoyance will make her even less trustful of the messages of care she receives.

* * *

Myth 3: Crazy women cannot function effectively. They cannot take on responsiblity, participate in meetings, give support, etc.

Reality: Women who are distressed sometimes can and sometimes cannot handle certain kinds of responsibility. Like any of us, women in distress need a chance to try and to make mistakes. The mental health system encourages mental patients to feel that they cannot handle responsibility. All of us need to have some responsibility and to be productive in order to feel positively about ourselves.

* * *

Myth 4: Crazy women are too much for me to deal with. I'm not qualified.

Reality: Any of us is too much for any one other person alone to deal with. But all of us are capable of giving each other some support. While it is true that many skills need to be acquired in order to dig through the maze of another's pain, we are all capable of simply listening to each other, which goes a long way toward relieving another woman of immediate overwhelming anxiety. The myth about craziness being some separate category of human pain that only "experts" understand keeps us away from each other and keeps the psychiatric industry solvent. It is a way of mystifying human pain and it invalidates the often basic, straightforward ways women can help each other.

It is also important to remember that listening to a woman's story does not make you responsible for her life. You can listen, empathize through your own experiences, and offer suggestions if you have them. But it is not helpful for either one of you if you begin to feel overwhelmed, so you must be clear about your own limits.

* * *

Myth 5: All crazy women are "out of touch" with reality.

Reality: Reality is subjective. No two people see the same reality, but usually they have enough in common to connect to each other. Labelling someone "out of touch" is another way of saying that we cannot find the connections to, or understand the rationale of their experience. Often the label is applied indiscriminately to women who are in distress.

Creating a separate reality is a protective reaction to another reality that is too painful to face.

When we insist on applying our own specific belief system to an "out of touch" person, we increase her isolation. (An analogy can be made to the male police officer who has no connection to the "hysterical" battered woman from whom he is trying to get a coherent story.) Being in a place that does not connect to other people's lives is a painful form of isolation.

* * *

Myth 6: Women who end up in mental hospitals are really crazy.

Reality: Women who end up in hospitals have usually had extensive experience with violence in their lives. They become hospitalized when their practical and emotional support systems break down. Emotional support systems break down for women because the people around them refuse to deal with the expression of their rage and pain.

Institutionalization is highly correlated to real practical problems like poverty and abuse. People with incomes less than $3000 have the highest utilization rate for state hospitals. People who have experienced incest (rape by their fathers) also have a higher hospitalization rate. In fact, women who have been traditionally considered subordinate creatures, isolated in their homes, account for 65% of all psychiatric in-patients.

It is true that sometimes people who have been hospitalized behave in ways that we label crazy. Most of these behaviors (like manipulation, repetitive motions or hoarding items on the person) are learned as ways to cope with the degradation and oppression of the hospital environment or as a direct result of the violence which the institution has delivered to the patient. This violence may take direct physical forms like electroshock, drugs, or psychosurgery or extensive isolation, or it may take equally powerful, but more insidious forms like boredom, depersonalization, invalidation, disempowerment, and regimentation.

* * *

Myth 7: Craziness is hopeless and endless. Once a woman is crazy, she'll never change, and, even if she did, the craziness could return at any moment.

Reality: Most women "recover" from craziness just as most of us recover from sadness or depression. Human beings have an enormous potential for change. The expectation of permanence, however, makes change difficult. This idea of permanent craziness is used to justify lack of action by both institutions and individuals. Hospitals use the label "chronic" as an excuse to offer little or no treatment, and individuals tend to avoid real contact with people who are too "needy."

Craziness is a response to an oppressive environment. When we don't take into account the oppressive elements in the environment, we are perpetuating the conditions that cause craziness.

* * *

Myth 8: Being crazy can be an exciting and fulfilling journey. People should be free to follow their impulses and to explore craziness if they want.

Reality: It is true that there are some experiences labelled "crazy" which ought to be valued, like psychic phenomena, expressing pain, or ritual, but the experience of craziness is extremely painful, especially in its isolation and desperation. In addition, being labelled crazy means further disempowerment and loss of credibility. A crazy women is even more susceptible to violence. Craziness is by no means a situation chosen freely to enhance personal growth.

* * *

Myth 9: Psychiatric hospitalization isn't my problem. I've never been a mental patient, never plan to be one, and this isn't important enough for me to do anything about.

Reality: Psychiatry is pervasive. The facts are enough to make that clear. Over 7,000,000 Americans are being "treated" by the mental health system. Of all the in-patients, 65% are women. Over 22% of all Americans take legal mind-altering drugs. In fact, pharmaceutical companies outperform all other major American companies in net profits after taxes. Of the between 600 and 1000 lobotomies performed each year, women and children constitute the largest subgroup.

Psychiatry is based on a system of logic in which it is impossible for a woman to fulfill her role as a woman and to be seen as a healthy adult. This psychiatric "expertise" affects us in schools, courts, hospitals, on-the-job, and through the media.

Psychiatric abuse affects all women, and, given the stresses of our lives, we are all potential mental patients.

* * *

Myth 10: Crazy women are violent and need to be locked up, tied down, drugged and secluded.

Reality: Not many crazy women are violent; actually the most common diagnosis for women is depression. Those who are violent are not violent most of the time. A woman is violent almost inevitably as a response to violence. Being locked up, tied down, or secluded is an additional violence to her that may be added to the feelings she has about being forced to be in a mental hospital. These restraints do not cure her, but rather they exacerbate the problem. People who have been seriously or repeatedly violated need support to find ways to vent their rage that do not harm themselves or other people. They do not need to experience more violence at the hands of the institutions.

* * *

Myth 11: Women who want to commit suicide should be forcefully restrained; or, conversely, women who want to commit suicide should be allowed to do so.

Reality: No matter how calm and determined a woman seems about committing suicide, underneath her demeanor is a decision rooted in a sense of overwhelming hopelessness and powerlessness and in an ultimate form of isolation. So, whereas women who are considering suicide need to know that they do have responsibility for their own lives, they also need to know that there are people who care about them and who would be hurt or angered by their self-destruction. People who are considering suicide are in intense pain. They are not responsible for the causes of that pain and they do deserve support from other people in dealing with it.

* * *

Myth 12: Craziness is inherited from one's parents, or perhaps it is caused by one's mother during the early years of one's life.

Reality: Whatever predisposition one may have to craziness, it comes as a response to real life stresses. There are many stresses in an environment that is persistently oppressive.

By linking craziness solely to genetic causes or early history, we are taking the responsibility for oppression away from the ill society that causes it and placing it on the victim. If we do that, we ignore the sources of mental illness and seek change in places that cannot produce it.

* * *

Myth 13: Crazy women are extremely emotional. They are not at all clear about what's really happening.

Reality: Women in distress may be experiencing a lot of painful emotions or they may be totally shut down. In any case, feeling emotion does not necessarily impair rational thinking. Perceptions are always subjective and distressed women are no more or less subjective than anyone else. Chances are that an angry woman has something to be angry about, a paranoid woman has something to fear.

This is the same old tired argument used by men to justify the oppression of women, that somehow we are too emotional (and fragile) to be able to have power and think clearly. The fear and devaluing of emotion has hurt and continues to hurt all of us.

—Elizabeth Stone House, an alternative program for women in crisis, providing shelter, support and advocacy.

Dealing With Women In Crisis

Listening And Giving Support

- Be real. People in crisis already are very sensitive to others; they will catch you hiding behind a role.
- You need to decide when to set limits. You can set them by bartering or by standing firm on your own determination. Trust your gut.
- A woman may need space to freak out before calming down and talking.
- A lot of crisis counseling is bearing witness to her pain: allowing her to go through it but staying with her.
- Maintain eye contact, even if she doesn't; she will be aware of it.
- Stay physically on the same level.
- Maintain a respectful, non-judgmental attitude toward the woman (not necessarily toward her actions).
- Give criticism in a form of "I feel...when you do..."
- Show empathy by feeding back what you hear. Paraphrase.
- Look for subtitles—e.g., "I am so tired of it all" may be subtitled "I want to kill myself"; figure out what is behind what she is talking about, especially if time is a problem.
- Take all she said and make it simpler, classify and present it back to her.
- Prioritize together; decide what needs to be dealt with first and start with that. Either deal with items in turn or give some indication of when others might be dealt with.
- Try to present options. People in crisis often think they don't have options.
- Don't get into "why" during the crisis; it may avoid getting closure.
- Watch when she seems to have gone through the needed crisis and is holding onto crisis. Use your own sense of fatigue or boredom. Lay it out that you are tired and need to set limits.
- Sometimes it is appropriate to touch her as a way to ground or center her. Use your instincts or ask her how comfortable she is with being touched. Don't touch her more than you are comfortable with.
- Make sure you get back to her, touch base again within the next few days.
- Take part in peer supervision; get feedback on your own process, feelings, places you felt you did well or not well.

Handling Psychiatric Emergencies

★ The first thing to do is to listen. Don't be in a hurry to give advice. Try to understand what's happening, what the person is feeling. Look for a handle to the person's situation. Try to figure out what's oppressing her, what's making her feel the way she does. Once you've done that, you can start looking for options, for a way out of the dilemma.

★ You need to be *calm*. If you can't be calm, find someone else who can be. As you listen try to be accepting. If she feels something, she has reason to feel it; respect her integrity. If you're calm and listening, you can start responding to her, which will help to clarify her situation.

★ Understand how people's self esteem can be shot to pieces by crassness, inappropriate humor or a casual air. Most people in emotional crisis are feeling empty and helpless. Try not to make her feel worse about herself. Look for genuine assets in her and her situation. Try to restore a woman's self confidence.

★ Follow your hunches and your feelings; they're almost always right. Get in touch with what you feel, then think about it. If you feel sad, chances are the other person feels sad. If you feel scared, chances are she feels scared too. Use feelings, not ideas, as your main guide.

★ Don't be ashamed of being ignorant or feeling helpless. The other person probably feels the same way. Therapy is a human act, not some mysterious mumbo-jumbo. Ask questions if you're ignorant and admit it if you feel helpless. There's no need to pretend to know what you don't.

★ Let the other person tell you in her own way what is wrong. Don't make her follow your rules, like telling her to "act out her feelings" or do things you've learned in some encounter group. This isn't fun and games: if you try to help someone through a trying time, you need to accept the responsibility that goes with that.

★ People become disturbed in different ways. Some are horribly depressed; some in a state of panic; some are violent; some confused and irrational; some are incomprehensible. Almost everyone in emotional crisis is terrified of losing control. They want to feel some kind of support, some kind of protection. Try to give that in a crisis.

★ In the same line of thought, if you feel that a woman is so out of control that she is too much for you to deal with, don't pretend what you can't do. Get someone with more experience, or think about a hospital.

It's foolish to take chances with people's lives, especially if they are dangerous to themselves or others. Don't get hung up on the rhetoric of we-should-all-be-able-to-take-care-of-one-another. Sometimes we simply can't and it's good to know what your options are.

★ Tell a woman what you're doing; don't mystify her. Don't make phone calls behind her back, or agree with her when you're planning something else. No matter how flipped out someone is, there is always a part of her that is aware of reality: speak to that part and she'll respond.

★ Be positive. She needs to hear good things about herself. Don't be glibly optimistic or say things you don't mean but point out her strong points when you see them.

★ If you start feeling bored, try to focus on the problem. What's going on? How can you help? How can she help herself? What is the real problem and what are the options?

★ A word about depression: Life in this society is filled with insults, painful experiences and real losses. Not only is our self esteem smashed time and again, but we have to endure separations from people close to us—friends who leave, who die, who go to jail, etc. There's a natural healing over such a loss, but it takes time. Don't expect a woman not to feel these human emotions. Often depression is a cover for oppression. If there's no "real" loss going on, look for the oppression that's making the other person feel so badly. Help her understand that it's not "in her head" but in the world that such oppression exists. Help her get in touch with others who share her oppression.

★ A word about paranoia: Paranoia is a state of heightened awareness. Paranoid feelings are almost always justified, at least in part. Don't argue with her; try to see where the feelings are true and what that means for her. This society makes us all suspicious, mistrustful, manipulated: "paranoid." Help her to recognize the truth of her paranoia and to stop being immobilized or destroyed by her awareness.

★ A word about violent people: Violent people are often very frightened and can be calmed down if you protect them and treat them as people, not monsters. Sometimes though, people are just out of touch. Don't try to be a heroine and endanger yourself and others. Do what you can without being foolhardy; talk straight to someone who's violent. Be reasonable, not threatening.

This article is based on 2 articles, one by Elizabeth Stone House and the other modified by Elizabeth Stone House, which originally appeared as "People's Psychiatry Sheet" in **Rough Times** *Magazine.*

Women And Alcoholism

What Is Alcoholism?

The American Medical Association defines alcoholism as a progressive disease. The *Women's Alcoholism Program of CASPAR, Inc.* adheres to this disease concept of alcoholism and, in diagnosing alcoholism, uses a functional definition. A woman is said to have alcoholism when her dependence on alcohol is so great that she has lost control over her drinking—in quantity, frequency, time and place of consumption; so that her drinking interferes with some major aspect of her life: family, work, social connections or physical health. One does not have to be physically addicted in order to be alcoholic.

Detecting Alcoholism

A common question is how to detect alcoholism. If you are concerned about a woman's drinking and need some help in determining if she is alcoholic, the following guideposts might be of use:

- *does she try to hide her drinking (get someone else to buy her alcohol, buying at different places, hiding empties)?*
- *does she frequently use alcohol for relief from pressure or after arguments, etc.?*
- *does she often reward herself with alcohol?*
- *is there an overall preoccupation with alcohol so that she becomes panicky when faced with non-drinking days or events?*
- *is she often ashamed of things she said or did while drinking?*
- *does she "black out" (i.e., suffer loss of memory) during drinking so that after drinking she may not remember what she said or did?*
- *is she defensive when her drinking is mentioned and/or are those close to her concerned about her drinking?*
- *is she unable to meet responsibilities because of her drinking?*
- *has she required medical attention because of her drinking?*

Things To Know

When confronted with an alcoholic woman there are special problems of which you should be aware. Women are often closeted and protected in their drinking by friends and family. At the same time, there is a greater risk that they will be deserted by friends and family because of their drinking. One out of ten women leaves an alcoholic man; nine out of ten men leave alcoholic women.

Women more frequently than men turn to mental health professionals for their problems and more frequently receive psychiatric diagnoses. Women are often treated with drugs, especially the "minor" tranquilizers like librium and valium even when alcoholism is the primary problem. Consequently, there is a high rate of poly-drug abuse among women, often a combination of alcohol and tranquilizer abuse. The combination of alcoholism and abuse of street drugs (marijuana, downers and opiates) is also frequently seen.

It is important to be especially sensitive to the difficulties of alcoholic women with children. It is difficult to enter intensive alcoholism treatment when there are children to take care of and nobody else to care for them. Alcoholic women with children often resist treatment out of fear of losing their children. Moreover, alcoholic mothers are often assumed to be bad mothers.

If you are concerned about a woman's drinking it is important to talk with her about it and you should probably refer her to an alcohol treatment center. In thinking about how to be helpful and supportive to a woman about her drinking, you should be aware that there are attitudes which are more and less helpful in directing a woman toward help. Please see "Suggested Do's and Don'ts for Confronting Alcohol and Drug Abuse" for ideas.

It is important to remember that a woman's denial of her drinking is common and it may take numerous concerned, gentle confrontations before she takes action. You may not be appreciated. You are the bearer of bad news—that the alcohol that she feels she needs in order to cope is the source of much of her problem.

Do's and Don'ts for Confronting Alcohol And Drug Abuse

The following are a few basic suggestions for confronting a woman whom you believe is abusing alcohol and /or drugs. It is by no means complete, nor the only answer. However, this may give you some ideas for handling a difficult task.

Do's:

- *Be honest and direct; confront the abuse.*
- *Set your limits: what you will and will not tolerate.*
- *Encourage her to get help.*
- *Let her know you are concerned and that you care about her.*
- *Remind her of the value of her life.*
- *Let her know that help is available, and let her know that her alcoholism or drug abuse is not her fault, nor a symptom of some moral weakness.*
- *Let her know that most people's lives improve remarkably when they stop drinking and/or abusing drugs.*
- *Let her know that, if not treated, alcoholism and drug abuse can get worse.*

Don'ts:

- *Avoid her alcohol or drug abuse.*
- *Protect her from the consequences of her drinking or her drug abuse.*
- *Cancel her appointments or take over her responsibilities.*
- *Hide or throw away her liquor or drugs.*
- *Make excuses for her drinking or drug abuse.*
- *Blame her for something over which she has no control.*
- *Force her to change—she must be ready to do it for herself.*
- *Cut her drugs or alcohol off—for a woman who has a serious addiction, it could be dangerous; she should be referred to a treatment center and/or doctor.*

—Marie Herbert

Women And Drug Abuse

Simply defined, drug abuse is a dependency on drugs (and/or alcohol) to cope with the stresses of daily life. Drugs produce quick and superficial changes in moods and behaviors, and therefore provide the user with a false sense of being in control of her situation or able to cope. Drugs also help a person "feel good," however temporary the effect. For women who are having a hard time coping, whether as a result of violence, anxiety or other problems in their lives, drugs can be attractive as a way of getting through. Moreover, women are prescribed drugs at an alarming rate. 45% of American women are regularly prescribed mood-altering drugs by doctors.*

Descriptions Of Common Drugs

The following is a description of the typical uses and effects of the drugs most commonly abused by women.

Depressants:

They depress the central nervous system which makes people sleepy and slows down breathing and circulation. Depressants include alcohol, tranquilizers, barbituates and other sedatives.

Tranquilizers (Valium, Librium, etc.): Cause fatigue, poor balance; overuse reduces amount of time a person dreams each night. After such overuse, a period of vivid, sometimes nightmarish, dreams, or insomnia can follow. It's possible to develop a physical dependency if used more than a few months. Withdrawal symptoms may occur when stopping use abruptly. Heavy users should withdraw under care of a physician.

Barbituates (Nembutal, Seconal, Amytal, Busitol): Cause drowsiness, confusion, and loss of memory. Large dosages have intoxicating effect similar to alcohol. The potential for overdose and physical and psychological addiction is very high. Withdrawal after prolonged use is dangerous because it can lead to convulsions and even death, therefore heavy users should do so under the care of a physician.

Alcohol and Depressants: The most common and dangerous misuse is mixing alcohol and depressants. The combination causes greater sedative effect than may have been desired. This is a frequent cause of accidental death.

Stimulants:

They stimulate the nervous system. They make women more alert, active and nervous. They usually relieve drowsiness and disguise the effects of fatigue and exhaustion. The most commonly prescribed stimulants are amphetamines, often called "diet pills."

Dexedrine (diet pills), Benzedrine: Decreases appetite; makes one feel extremely active and confident; or one may become angry, irritable and suspicious. Other effects may include dry mouth, fever, insomnia, blurred vision and dizziness. Can lead to psychological dependence, which may lead to depression when stopping use.

Cocaine: causes brief sense of euphoria, excitement and well being. Continued use can damage nose, throat and sinuses.

Narcotics:

Some narcotics, such as **Darvon** and **Demerol,** are used medically as pain-killers and cough suppressants. **Opiates** such as morphine, codeine and heroin are a more powerful category of narcotics. These drugs all produce a feeling of being high. They are both psychologically and physically addictive.

Confronting Drug Abuse

In many cases immediate detection of drug abuse is difficult, so observe the person over a period of time. The key signs to be aware of with any drug abuse are: extreme changes in moods and behavior, and defensiveness and secretiveness about the use of drugs.

When you think that a woman may be abusing drugs, talk to her and find out to what extent she is using them and/or if she is addicted. See "Suggested Do's and Don'ts for Confronting Alcohol and Drug Abuse" for some ideas. Additionally, encourage her to do physical activity such as jogging, exercises, yoga, and so forth, which will help to reduce her tension and anxiety as well as make her feel good, and thus eventually may become a substitute for using drugs.

If a woman is addicted to drugs, withdrawal will be difficult and can even be dangerous. She should undergo detoxification with supervision from a private physician or through a drug treatment program.

—Margo Rey

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*Gena Corea, ***The Hidden Malpractice,*** Jove Books, 1979.*

Chapter 7:

Where To Get More Information

Introduction

This manual is an overview and, as such, cannot cover everything. We have included two bibliographies. The first is an annotated bibliography on woman abuse, and gives a variety of sources of information about battering. It includes books and articles from a variety of perspectives on the issue.

The second is a chapter-by-chapter bibliography which can give you some suggestions of where to go for more in-depth information about the various subjects we've touched upon.

*If you're interested in learning more and can't find materials listed, or want to know about other resources, there is much additional information in these areas available from the Mass. Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups' office at 355 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116 (617-266-8545). Articles marked with * are available through our office because they are often difficult to get otherwise. The Domestic Violence Technical Assistance Project of Casa Myrna Vazquez is also an excellent source of information in all aspects of our work, and is particularly useful for information about racism and its effects on Black and Latina women. It is located at 342 Shawmut Avenue, Boston, MA 02118 (617-266-4305).*

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This bibliography is not intended to be exhaustive but to give an overview of some good materials available on the issue of domestic violence.

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